

**SENIOR ESOL STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES OF AND
ATTITUDES TOWARDS
FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT
IN MAINSTREAM SECONDARY CLASSROOMS**

Huili Feng

Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the
degree of Master of Teaching and Learning

University of Canterbury

JULY 2007

ABSTRACT

Assessment is one of the key strategies that, if used correctly, can effectively enhance student learning. This study explores senior ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) students' experiences of and attitudes towards formative assessment in the mainstream classroom. The purpose of this study was to investigate how formative assessment might be used effectively to enhance ESOL students' learning from the perspective of senior ESOL students.

Data were collected using mixed methods including questionnaires and follow-up interviews with a range of participants from different ethnic backgrounds. One hundred ESOL students participated in the questionnaire and 22 were subsequently interviewed. The questionnaire provided data on the majority ESOL students' experiences and attitudes. Then the interviews allowed participants to describe their experiences and attitudes in more detail. The qualitative methodology used also provided the opportunity for the participants to explain any possible reasons for their attitudes.

This study revealed that all the participants had some experiences in some of the formative assessment activities used in classroom. The participants' perspectives also indicated that ESOL students' high expectations for their academic achievement relied on teachers' understanding of their needs as well as effective classroom practice.

Feedback was the most favoured formative assessment method by the ESOL students because the students could find out what they had done correctly and where they had gone wrong. Questioning was not liked by the participants, partly because of the language barrier limiting

their understanding of the questions, partly because of the way teachers asked the questions (i.e. no wait-time), and partly because of cultural sensitivity (i.e. not wanting to draw attention to oneself). However, the value of questioning as a formative assessment method was recognised by a number of the participants. Self-assessment was liked and found to be useful by some participants. Peer assessment was not liked because of the students' mistrust of their peers' ability to mark their work correctly. Sharing learning objectives and assessment criteria was regarded as an important way to enhance learning as long as teachers provided clear explanations.

The study raises questions about the effectiveness of existing formative assessment activities used in classroom and suggests some specific strategies that may help ESOL students learn more effectively. This study clearly indicates that not all formative assessments are equally effective to students of different backgrounds. The choice of formative assessment methods and the way they are administered in class are both important in determining their success for the participants. ESOL students have their own characteristics and needs (e.g. language limitations) and these should to be taken into consideration when choosing and implementing formative assessment methods. The study is of interest in particular to those who teach ESOL students in mainstream classrooms but also has strong links to the field of cross cultural communication, and to the study of effective teaching and learning.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my grandmother, whose love and wisdom greatly sustained my personal and professional life, but sadly did not live to see the completion of my master's study.

I would like to acknowledge and express my special thanks to the following people who assisted me in this thesis:

To my supervisors: Jae Major and Judy Williams from the College of Education, sincere and heart-felt appreciation for their encouragement, support and guidance. It was a privilege to have them as my supervisors. I am very grateful.

To all the MTchLn staff for their positive support and encouragement along the way in the various master papers I have completed.

To all those participants who contributed data by completing questionnaires, taking part in interviews and provide further information or feedback.

To all those schools for giving me the permission to be able to conduct this research.

To all those ESOL teachers from participants' schools for making the effort and giving their time to support me with this research.

To the Ministry of Education for the half-year study leave grant, which has allowed me to focus on my study and to complete the thesis in good time.

To my employer Christchurch Boys' High for helping me with part payment of my study fee.

To my friends and colleagues who encouraged and supported me during my difficult times.

And, finally, to my family for their patience and support throughout this journey while I was busy with my work during so many nights, weekends and holidays.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iv
TABLE OF CONTENTS	v
LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES	viii
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Background of the Study	1
1.2 Research Questions	2
1.3 Author's Position	3
1.4 Significance of the Study	5
1.5 Definitions of Terms	6
1.6 Summary	7
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW	8
2.1 Introduction	8
2.2 Constructivism and Vygotsky's Socio-cultural Theory	8
2.3 Formative Assessment	10
2.4 ESOL Students in Mainstream Classrooms	15
2.5 Current Assessment Situation in New Zealand Secondary Schools	21
2.6 Summary	26
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY	29
3.1 Introduction	29
3.2 Research Methodology	29
3.3 Research Design	34
3.3.1 Participants Selection	35

3.3.2	Questionnaire Design	37
3.3.3	Interview	41
3.4	Data Analysis	45
3.4.1	Questionnaire	46
3.4.2	Interview	46
3.5	Issues	47
3.6	Summary	50
CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS		51
4.1	Introduction	51
4.2	General Information	51
4.3	Understanding of Formative Assessment	52
4.4	Experience of Formative Assessment	54
4.5	Attitudes towards Formative Assessment	57
4.5.1	Data from Questionnaire	57
4.5.2	Data from the Interviews	60
4.6	Suggestions	69
4.7	Summary	72
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION		73
5.1	Introduction	73
5.2	Experiences of Formative Assessment and its Effectiveness	73
5.2.1	Sharing Learning Objectives and Assessment Criteria	74
5.2.2	Feedback	75
5.2.3	Questioning	78
5.2.4	Self-assessment	81
5.2.5	Peer-assessment	83

5.3	ESOL Students' Attitudes towards Formative Assessment	84
5.3.1	Speaking Related Activities	85
5.3.2	Practice	86
5.3.3.	More Clear Explanation and Help from the Teacher	86
5.3.4	Group Work	87
5.4	Other Implications of Findings	88
5.4.1	English Language Used in Formative Assessment	89
5.4.2	Alternative Assessments	89
5.5	Summary	91
CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSIONS		92
6.1	Introduction	92
6.2	Main Findings	92
6.3	Limitation of the Study	94
6.4	Future Research	95
6.5	Summary	96
BIBLIOGRAPHY		97
APPENDIX:		105
A.	Letters of Information	105
B.	Consent Forms	111
C.	Questionnaire	112
D.	Semi-structured Interview Questions	115

LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES

TABLES

4.1	Feedback on assessment or work	56
-----	--------------------------------	----

FIGURES

4.1	Nationalities of the participants	51
4.2	Frequency of assessments	54
4.3	Frequency of teachers' explanation and students' understanding of criteria	54
4.4	Frequency of two strategies used by teachers for encouraging students' responses to questions.	55
4.5	Frequency of self assessment and peer assessment	57
4.6	Comparison of five commonly used formative assessment methods	58
4.7	Feeling towards assessments in general	59
4.8	Attitudes towards assessment in general	59

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

There are currently a large number of overseas students, particularly from Asian countries, studying in New Zealand schools. Studying in a foreign language is an enormous challenge. The extent of this challenge is often reflected in the performance of non-English speaking background students (Wilson, 2001). Many of the English for Speakers of Other Languages (henceforth ESOL) students enrolled in mainstream programs experience difficulties with English as a medium of instruction (Duff, 2005). Over time, as they adjust culturally and acquire better command of English, their performance tends to improve.

Assessment is one of the most important components of teaching and learning, which, if done effectively, can significantly improve students' performance (Black & Wiliam, 1999). Black and Wiliam (1998b) suggest that learning is driven by what teachers and students do in the classroom, therefore teachers need to know about their students' progress and difficulties with learning so that they can adapt their own work to meet students' needs. However, differences in schooling and cultural traditions lead to different understandings of learning, teaching and assessment. Therefore, how well ESOL students understand their assessment will greatly impact on the effectiveness of assessment in the classroom to enhance learning.

From my seven years experience of teaching ESOL students in New Zealand, I have found that when ESOL students choose to study in New Zealand, they come with hopes, expectations and understandings. Their teachers also have hopes, expectations and

understandings regarding these students (Dalglish, 2005). In fact, students and teachers are generally hoping for the same things, i.e. that students will pass their subjects, understand the concepts and improve their English. However, there are significant differences in the extent to which they hope for these things, and the ways they believe will be successful in achieving them. Jonasson (2004) suggests that assessment itself might be the master key to unlock the level of achievement, the level of understanding, and the level of language that these students and their teachers are hoping for. She points out that assessment is a dominant determinant of learning behaviour, an integral part of the teaching and learning process, and a significant contributor to learning outcomes.

Formative assessment is acknowledged as one of the best ways to raise students' achievement in the classroom (Black & Wiliam, 1998b). However, there is a lack of research on what ESOL students think about formative assessment and whether formative assessment is effective for ESOL students in mainstream classrooms. I believe this may affect their learning in the mainstream classroom if teachers do not have sufficient knowledge of ESOL students. Better understanding of ESOL students' experiences of and attitudes towards formative assessments is urgently needed if we want ESOL students to benefit from formative assessment which is an increasing element of teaching practice at secondary level.

1.2 Research Questions

Research generally begins with a question to answer, a problem to explore or a situation to change (Mutch, 2003). The initial question for this study was: "What are senior ESOL students' experiences of and attitudes towards formative assessment in the mainstream

secondary classroom?” To keep the research process focused, the study, and especially the data-gathering process, was guided by the following questions:

- What are the common formative assessment activities that ESOL students identify that they have experienced in the mainstream secondary classroom?
- Do they understand the formative assessments they are aware of? Why/ why not?
- Are formative assessment activities perceived by ESOL students as an effective way of helping their learning? Why? Why not?
- Do ESOL students actively participate in any of the formative assessments in the mainstream classroom? Why / why not?
- What are ESOL students’ attitudes towards formative assessment in the mainstream classroom?

These questions were designed to allow and encourage answers beyond the researcher’s own experiences and knowledge. With fifteen years of teaching experience in ESOL, I deliberately made the research questions open-ended with the intention of allowing for unexpected responses in order to achieve the trustworthiness of the research. Open-ended questions are the most effective method to gather an “authentic” understanding of people’s experiences (Silverman, 1993). More details are discussed in the Methodology Chapter.

1.3 Author’s Position

Mutch (2003) suggests that the qualitative paradigm emphasises the subjective nature of the researcher in any study – often referred to as the “researcher as instrument”. One underlying assumption is that the choices made by researchers reflect their interests and background

(Mutch, 2003). My interest in ESOL has arisen through my fifteen years of teaching, but in more recent times through Master's level study in curriculum, pedagogy and assessment. Questions on how to help ESOL students to enhance their learning have come to the fore over the years.

My philosophy for education is based on my teaching and learning experience in both China and New Zealand. I have been teaching ESOL for fifteen years, including eight years of teaching English as a foreign language in China and seven years of teaching ESOL in New Zealand. In my experience, ESOL teachers seem to have a better understanding of ESOL students' learning needs than many mainstream subject teachers. How can mainstream subject teachers become more mindful of the need to adjust methods of presentation, use of materials, the learning environment, and assessment procedures to accommodate the needs of individual students who are from diverse cultural backgrounds? Mainstream subject teachers often expect ESOL students to simply assimilate the style of learning and acquire the knowledge of the mainstream system regarding curriculum and assessment (Wilson, 2001).

In my position as an ESOL teacher in a secondary school in New Zealand, I have reflected on how adequately I understand and meet the particular learning needs of diverse students. This concern has led me to believe that there is a need to investigate the learning needs of ESOL students in order to better understand and meet their needs in mainstream classroom. I am particularly interested in formative assessment because I believe it is a way to monitor students' progress in their learning and a means of identifying learning needs.

My learning experiences in New Zealand helped me to become an insider to understand the different challenges and learning needs that ESOL students generally have as I had similar

experiences to the participants, which could help me understand their perspectives. But I am also an ESOL teacher. Being in a teaching situation helped me to become an outsider to understand formative assessment from a teacher's perspective. My intention was that the data generated by the study about how formative assessment was experienced by ESOL students would inform teachers to use formative assessment in a more effective way to meet the needs of ESOL students in mainstream classrooms, ultimately leading to a more effective way to help their learning. However, my experience and knowledge in ESOL teaching and learning could create potential bias in the research. In order to avoid this, I used different strategies in the research process which are detailed in Chapter Three.

1.4 Significance of the Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate senior ESOL students' experiences of and attitudes towards formative assessment. The findings are thus expected to be beneficial to ESOL students.

Assessment in the secondary school has traditionally been seen as summative, or the process of establishing the standard reached by a student at the end of a particular course of learning (Williams, 2001). In more recent times, there has been recognition that assessment can also be used to monitor achievement during a teaching-learning-evaluation cycle in order to improve students' learning (Williams, 2001). Black and Wiliam (1998b) have also established the need for teachers to be more informed about the use of formative assessment in their classrooms, as one of the conditions for raising classroom standards.

The importance of formative assessment is clearly articulated for classroom teachers (Ministry of Education, 1993; Williams, 2001). However there is limited guidance to help teachers understand how to use formative assessment to enhance ESOL students' learning. To date there has been very little knowledge or research about ESOL students' experience and attitudes towards formative assessment. The findings from this study will be an original contribution to the knowledge of ESOL students' learning experiences in the mainstream classroom.

If New Zealand teachers are to cater successfully for students from a diverse range of ethnic backgrounds, it is important that we develop a better understanding of their experiences of and attitudes towards formative assessment in the mainstream secondary classroom. This may lead to a better understanding of how to use formative assessment to help with their learning. A better understanding of the effects of teachers' current practices on ESOL students' learning could be used to improve their classroom practice. Pre-service training providers may also find such information useful in order to better prepare trainee teachers for their classroom practice when there are ESOL students in mainstream classroom.

1.5 Definitions of Terms

A range of acronyms is used to refer to learners who are not members of the cultural and linguistic majority in New Zealand. For example NESB (non-English speaking backgrounds used by the Ministry of Education in New Zealand), ELL (English language learners used in USA), LEP (limited English proficiency used in USA), EAL (English as an additional language) etc. I choose to use ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages). Although it is a mouthful when you say the whole phrase, it is the most commonly used acronym and

understood by most teachers in New Zealand. “ESOL students” is a commonly used term in school contexts.

ESOL: English for speakers of other languages (including migrants, refugees and fee-paying international students).

NESB: Non-English speaking background (including migrants, refugees and fee-paying international students)

FA: Formative Assessment

Black and Wiliam (1998b) define assessment broadly to include all activities that teachers and students undertake to get information that can be used diagnostically to alter teaching and learning. Under this definition assessment encompasses teacher observation, classroom discussion, and analysis of student work, including homework and test. Assessments become formative when the information is used to adapt teaching and learning to meet student needs.

Mainstream Classroom: A regular classroom where all students are catered for and taught the usual curriculum by teachers with regular teaching qualifications.

1.6 Summary

This study explores the perceptions of some senior ESOL students of formative assessment. It was developed in response to the discussion by Black and Wiliam on the effectiveness of formative assessment in raising classroom standards (1998b). Data were gathered through a questionnaire, which was followed up with semi-structured interviews. The data were analysed, resulting themes were discussed and some conclusions were drawn. The thesis is divided into the following Chapters: Introduction; Literature review; Methodology; Results; Discussion; and Conclusions.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter will explore the three broad areas of literature into which the study fits:

Constructivism and Vygotsky's sociocultural theory; formative assessment and its effects on learning; ESOL students in mainstream classrooms and current assessment situation in New Zealand secondary schools. This review will explore the effectiveness of formative assessment on learning, types of formative assessment used in classroom practice, factors affecting ESOL students' learning in mainstream classrooms and the importance of using formative assessment in an effective way in order to meet the needs of all students, especially the linguistically and culturally diverse.

2.2 Constructivism and Vygotsky's Socio-cultural Theory

Contemporary learning theories, including constructivism, cognitive theory, and socio-cultural theory, share several core principles. Most important are two concepts: that knowledge is constructed through language and interaction, and that learning and development are culturally embedded, socially supported processes (Shepard, 2005).

Social Constructivism, pioneered by theorists such as Vygotsky highlights the importance of culture and context in forming understanding. Learning is not a purely internal process, nor is it a passive shaping of behaviours (Vygotsky, 1986). Vygotsky described learning as being embedded within social events and occurring as a child interacts with people, objects and

events in the environment. He suggested that learning environments should involve guided interactions that permit children to reflect on inconsistency and to change their conceptions through communication (Lamon, 2007).

From a constructivist perspective, formative assessments are more valuable to the learner (Lamon, 2007). Within social constructivist conceptions, formative assessment can be seen as a dynamic process in which teachers or classmates help learners move from what they already know to what they are able to do next, using their zone of proximal development (Shepard, 2005). The zone of proximal development is the range of potential each person has for learning, with that learning being shaped by the social environment in which it takes place. This potential ability is greater than the actual ability of the individual when the learning is facilitated by someone with greater expertise (Wertsch, 1991).

Scaffolding and formative assessment are strategies that teachers use to move learning forward in the zone of proximal development. Scaffolding refers to supports that teachers provide to the learner during problem solving in the form of reminders, hints, and encouragement to ensure successful completion of a task (Gibbons, 2002). From a socio-cultural perspective, formative assessment, like scaffolding, is a collaborative process and involves negotiation of meaning between teacher and learner about expectations and how best to improve performance (Shepard, 2005).

Vygotsky's theory has the potential to assist educational institutions to deliver instruction which meets the needs of all students, especially the linguistically and culturally diverse, who historically have been marginalized by traditional models of pedagogy. Vygotsky's theory

challenges traditional teaching methods and requires the teacher and students to play untraditional roles as they collaborate with each other (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988).

With the rapidly changing world around us, the increasing globalisation of the economy, the rapid flows of information and people around the world, Vygotsky's social constructivist explanations of learning may not tell the whole story but they do offer important ways of understanding the construction of knowledge in diverse classrooms. Related pedagogical developments such as scaffolding, reciprocal teaching and cooperative learning provide a link between Vygotsky's theory and teacher practice and formative assessment.

Teaching may be challenged to use formative assessment, which fosters each individual and provides the learner with a good guidance for further development. Whichever situation teachers find themselves in, they are required to provide the appropriate learning environment to enhance students' learning. From the socio-cultural learning theory, it is important for teachers to understand how to use formative assessment in a more effective way in order to meet ESOL students' learning needs.

2.3 Formative Assessment

Classroom assessment can be seen as having two main functions: assessment **of** learning and assessment **for** learning.

Assessment of learning (often described as summative assessment) aims to provide a well-founded, clear and up-to-date picture of a student's current capabilities or attitudes, progress over time or further growth needs and potential. Assessment for learning (often described as formative assessment) is focused on enhancing student development, and often involves

relatively unstructured interactions between student and student or teacher and student rather than a planned formal assessment event. (Crooks, 2002, p.241).

Assessment for learning - formative assessment - is not a new idea. It is the process of seeking and interpreting evidence for use by learners and their teachers to decide where the learners are in their learning, where they need to go and how best to get there. Firm evidence shows that formative assessment is an essential component of classroom work and that its development can raise standards of achievement (Black & Wiliam, 1998b). Black and Wiliam (1998a) conducted an extensive research review of 250 journal articles and book chapters to determine whether formative assessment raised academic standards in the classroom. They concluded that efforts to strengthen formative assessment could produce significant learning gains as measured by comparing the average improvements in test scores of the students involved in the innovation with the range of scores found for typical groups of students on the same tests. They also found that the formative assessment was apparently more helpful to low-achieving students, including students with learning disabilities (Black & Wiliam, 1998b).

A more recent study by Wiliam, Lee, Harrison and Black (2004) provides further evidence that improving formative assessment does produce tangible benefits in terms of externally mandated assessments. Some of the action plans of the intervention activities included questions – teacher questioning, pupil questioning; feedback – comment only marking and group work; sharing criteria with learners – marking criteria, making aim clear, teachers’ reviews, pupils’ review, classroom assessment; self-assessment; and others – e.g. including parents, using posters and presentations. The study found that the interventions resulted in student performance improvements equivalent to approximately one half of a GCSE (General

Certificate of Secondary Education) grade per student per subject. However, there is no evidence to suggest whether or these findings are applicable to ESOL students.

Until recently, assessment in New Zealand, as in many other countries, was focused mostly on describing what students knew for reporting or, at secondary school level, for gaining qualifications. Formative assessment has become a term known to most educators in New Zealand as a result of Black and Wiliam's work (Clarke, Timperley & Hattie, 2003). The Curriculum Update on assessment published by New Zealand Ministry of Education (MOE) in 2001 is strongly influenced by Black and Wiliam's work and emphasises using assessment information to improve learning (Clarke et al., 2003).

The basic structure for assessment of students in New Zealand schools is set out in The New Zealand Curriculum Framework (Ministry of Education, 1993). It states that:

The primary purpose of school-based assessment is to improve students' learning and the quality of learning programmes. Other purposes of assessment include providing feedback to parents and students, awarding qualifications at the senior secondary school level, and monitoring overall national educational standards. Assessment also identifies learning needs so that resources can be effectively targeted (p.24)

This shift in the focus of attention towards greater interest in the interactions between assessment and classroom learning is coupled with the hope that improvement in classroom assessment will make a strong contribution to the improvement of learning (Black & Wiliam, 1998b). Assessment is one of the most powerful educational tools for promoting effective learning . But it must be used in the right way. There is no evidence that increasing the amount of testing will enhance learning. Instead the focus needs to be on using assessments as part of teaching and learning, and in ways that will raise pupils' achievement (Black &

Wiliam, 1999). Assessments become formative when the information is used to adapt teaching and learning to meet student needs.

Black and Wiliam (1998a) define assessment broadly to include all activities that teachers and students undertake to get information that can be used diagnostically to alter teaching and learning. Under this definition assessment encompasses teacher observation, classroom discussion, and analysis of student work, including homework and tests.

Black and Wiliam (1999) indicate that improving learning through assessment depends on five key factors:

- the provision of effective feedback to pupils;
- the active involvement of pupils in their own learning;
- adjusting teaching to take account of the results of assessment;
- a recognition of the profound influence assessment has on the motivation and self-esteem of pupils, both of which are crucial influences on learning;
- the need for pupils to be able to assess themselves and understand how to improve.

Recent innovative developments in assessment include the development of self- and peer-assessment by pupils as ways of enhancing formative assessment (Klecker, 2002; McDonald & Boud, 2003; McMillan, 2003). Black and Wiliam conclude that self-assessment by pupils, far from being a luxury, is in fact an essential component of formative assessment (Black & Wiliam, 1998a).

Klecker (2002) found classroom assessment using cooperative groups had uniformly positive effects on students' performance. Formative classroom assessment using cooperative groups

is designed to measure how well the individual student responds to an assessment question after he or she has had an opportunity to discuss the answers with peers. This approach draws on constructivist theory that students learn better by collaborating and discussing concepts with peers than by constructing answers in isolation (Vygotsky, 1978). This approach is rooted in the theoretical assumptions that learning is an active, constructive process; that it depends on rich context; that learners are diverse; and that learners are inherently social. However, studies also show that this kind of approach may not be favoured by Confucian heritage students (Kennedy, 2002).

Peer and collaborative assessment provides a vehicle for undertaking formative assessment exercises (Orsmond, Merry & Callaghan, 2004). Peer assessment is the process where individuals or groups of students assess the work of their peers. Collaborative assessment occurs when students and their teachers combine to determine the criteria for assessment. Research conducted by Orsmond et al. (2004) supports earlier findings that peer and self-assessment were extremely useful in helping students reach their learning potentials. However, no research has been done to investigate whether peer and self-assessment are effective in helping ESOL students' learning.

Although the use of formative assessment was positively related to high achievement, no studies have been done to investigate whether formative assessment is effective to enhance ESOL students' learning. Besides, there is no research to evaluate the validity of the formative assessment approaches for students from all cultural backgrounds. In fact, Black and Wiliam (1998a) called for research to evaluate the performance or validity of some of the new formative assessment approaches under a range of subject settings and for students from all cultural backgrounds.

Formative assessment has an important role to play in raising the standards of learning achieved through schooling; an important national priority (Crook, 2002). Learning is driven by what teachers and students do in classroom. Therefore teachers need to know about their students' progress and difficulties with learning so that they can adapt their own work to meet students' needs – needs that are often unpredictable and that vary from one student to another (Black & Wiliam, 1998b).

Students benefit from assessment for learning in several critical ways:

First, they become more confident learners because they get to watch themselves succeeding. Furthermore, students come to understand what it means to be in charge of their own learning. Teachers benefit because their students become more motivated to learn. Parents benefit as well in seeing higher achievement and greater enthusiasm for learning in their children. School administrators and instructional leaders benefit from the reality of meeting accountability standards and from the public recognition of doing so (Stiggins, 2002, p.764)

In short, everyone wins. Stiggins suggests that the price to achieve such benefits is an investment in teachers and their classroom assessment practices. Professional development specially designed to give teachers the expertise they need to assess for learning must be a priority (Stiggins, 2002). If formative assessment is to be effective for ESOL students, a greater understanding of how it is perceived and understood by these students is an important next step. Currently we do not know if the benefits of formative assessment, identified in Western contexts, are also applicable to ESOL students. This study is designed to address this.

2.4 ESOL Students in Mainstream Classrooms

ESOL students come from diverse social and cultural backgrounds with varying abilities in academic ability and English language proficiency. Some students come from stable countries, with excellent educational systems and monetary resources, but others come as refugees from war-torn countries and interrupted studies (Whelan Ariza, 2006). ESOL students seem to fall into the following categories:

- Students with strong academic background in their native language who seek academic excellence;
- Average students in their own country and seek a second chance for a better education;
- New Zealand citizenship or residents, who speak a first language other than English;
- Students fluent in English, born or brought up in New Zealand, but with poor academic skills;
- Students with no formal schooling or interrupted schooling.

In New Zealand, schools put the students from the above different categories into three main categories: migrants, refugees and fee-paying international students. Regardless of the diversity of the students, they will be in the same classroom. For ESOL students who are newly arrived or fee-paying, usually a placement test is given to determine what level of English proficiency the student possesses. This is always a rough estimate because it is very difficult to pinpoint exactly what a student knows. Usually the levels of reading, writing, listening, speaking, and receptive knowledge are unbalanced (Whelan Ariza, 2006). Although there may be some specific ESOL support and a specialised English tuition programme, ESOL students still spend a lot of time in mainstream classrooms alongside native speakers.

The increased economic benefits from education export in New Zealand has led the government to move from an “aid to trade” orientation to international education over the last

two decades (Ward, 2001). The total enrolments of international students across all provider groups (including primary and secondary schools, tertiary education institutions and English language schools) increased by 253 percent (from 50,026 to 126,919) from 2000 to 2002, (MOE, 2006). The top three countries where the international students came from were China, Japan and South Korea, and they made up 65 percent of international student enrolments for 2005 (MOE, 2006). Although these numbers did not just come from secondary schools, they provide an indication of the ethnic make up or origins of international ESOL students in New Zealand secondary schools. This clearly shows that the majority of international ESOL students in New Zealand secondary schools are Asian. International ESOL students make up a large number of ESOL students in New Zealand secondary schools.

Although Asian cultures emphasize studying and being disciplined in school-work, this does not imply that school comes easy to every Asian ESOL student. They may experience high levels of stress in the classroom as their parents normally have high expectations for them and the students may even feel that acceptance is contingent on their school success (Whelan Ariza, 2006). Students also feel the pressure to become a 'Kiwi' while they still maintain their own cultural identity (Dickie, 1998).

New Zealand is a pluralistic society which is made up of people of many cultures, but success in the education system and employment in highly paid work is not achieved by all groups in our society (Dickie, 1998). Although New Zealand may be considered a multicultural country, what is taught in schools and how it is assessed is largely controlled by the dominant group of Pakeha who may believe that everybody has an equal opportunity to learn. Dickie (1998) also argues that in the New Zealand mainstream education system, where the curriculum and the pedagogy are derived from the dominant mainstream culture, teachers may not recognise

potentially useful skills which children bring to school from their own cultural backgrounds. Minority students tend to blame themselves, their parents, their culture, their limited English for their school failure rather than any problems in the education system (Dickie, 1998). For many students there is a gap between the expectations of their parents and the reality of their school achievements.

Although the presence of ESOL students has been assumed to enhance the potential for cultural interaction, there is no widespread evidence that the content of curricula has changed significantly (Ward, 2001). Smith (1998) concludes that educators largely adopt an assimilationist attitude believing that it is incumbent on ESOL students to adapt to the educational system and that special accommodation should be minimised. Teachers in Smith's study maintained that it is imperative to hold the same standards for everyone and they rarely took the time to check on difficulties that ESOL students were experiencing. Although there is an expanding literature on intercultural education and increasing development of training materials to enhance sensitivity among intercultural educators, in practice, the responsibility for adapting to and succeeding in a new educational system falls on the overseas students (Ward, 2001). Mainstream teachers bear the responsibility of teaching ESOL students in regular classrooms. Although many schools have ESOL programmes, I personally believe that the short time these specialized teachers spend with ESOL students is not sufficient to teach the necessary English language skills, let alone the academic language of the subjects taught in schools.

In addition to challenges with English language, Foliaki (1994) records that ESOL students also experience conflict between the culture of their home and the culture "they move around in". Parents and teachers may know little about each other yet each has a significant and

often contradictory influence the children (Hunkin, 1996). Hunkin (1996) points out that another obvious difficulty for minority students is the language of instruction in their school. Teachers who come from an English speaking background use the language as if it were the natural or first language of their students, some of whom come from homes where other languages are used for communication, daily negotiations and organisation. A related problem is that many mainstream teachers may not recognise that there is in fact a mismatch between the student's home and the school, and may not value the useful learning qualities the student brings from home (Dickie, 1998). When majority culture educators look at minority students, they tend to focus on what those students lack, focusing on the lack of proficiency in the majority language (English) and knowledge of the majority culture (Corson, 1993).

The New Zealand Curriculum favours a learner-centred approach that may not entirely suit all learners in New Zealand (Dickie, 1998). New Zealand schools have been based on European tradition, placing emphasis on individual effort, initiative and independence. A focus on co-operative learning and auditory and visual learning is supportive of minority students' learning (Dickie, 1998). However, it may not be recognised as a "proper" technique by learners from their education background.

Lloyd (1995) claims that teachers may increase the attainment of these students by identifying the cultural mismatch underlying the learning difficulties. Dickie (1998) reports that the successful schools emphasise aspects of the minority cultures as well as individual identity and self-esteem, while the less successful schools focus on producing "New Zealanders" and give little recognition to students' ethnicity. Positive changes occur in learning when schools modify their programmes to emphasise knowledge valued by their students.

Anstrom (1999) argued that many ESOL students spend the majority of their time in mainstream classes that are not specially designed to meet their needs, with teachers who have not received appropriate training in the education of diverse learners. The quality of the mainstream instruction they receive thus becomes a significant factor in whether these students succeed academically (Anstrom, 1999). Cleal (2002) suggests that some aspects of language used in assessment items may make interpretation and fulfilment of assessment requirements problematic, especially for ESOL students.

Duff's (2005) qualitative research on ESOL students in mainstream high school social studies courses found that besides occasional essay writing or multiple choice tests, students had to take part in debates and role-plays and in-class oral presentations, tasks that they were often uncomfortable with or ill-equipped for. Furthermore, she also found that both ESOL students and local students reported difficulty in understanding one another's English speech in class, which added to ESOL students' reticence to participate actively in class: they could not respond to or build on one another's utterances in discussions because they could not hear or comprehend one another (Duff, 2005).

One overall finding from Duff (2005) is that the challenges faced by ESOL students and their teachers are enormous. She reported that students often experience extreme social isolation and disappointment at their academic and linguistic development. Another common theme is that many secondary level programmes do not provide adequate content-based language and literacy instruction for students in English preparation classes, causing difficulties for students once they are mainstreamed (Duff, 2005).

Harklau (1994) reported that the tracking system used in schools further increased the differences between ESOL and mainstream environments, particularly for the ESOL students placed in low-track mainstream programmes. Social, linguistic, and academic support is typically inadequate after students enter the mainstream (Duff, 2005). The ESOL students' relative silence in mainstream classroom where interaction is expected was received negatively by the other students, who interpreted their behaviour as showing a lack of interest (Zuengler & Cole, 2005). Teachers also reported problems with the ESOL students' logic and idea development in their work. Attention needs to be paid to the sources of problems that academic staff, across the whole range of disciplines, may have in assessing the work of ESOL students (Ballard & Clanchy, 1991).

If New Zealand education is to provide equitable educational opportunities for children from all cultures, then clearly there is a need to deliver the curriculum in ways which better suit those children. In order to achieve this, it is important to understand ESOL students' learning needs in mainstream classrooms from their perspectives.

2.5. Current Assessment Situation in New Zealand Secondary Schools

In New Zealand, from early childhood education to tertiary education, assessment of individual students has predominantly been viewed as a responsibility of the person or people directly involved in their teaching (Crooks, 2002). The main exceptions to this have been national examinations in the final three years of secondary education and some examinations for trade qualifications in polytechnics. For summative assessments in the final three years of secondary education there is extensive use of national examinations, together with inter-

teacher moderation procedures to achieve greater consistency in some of the assessments made by individual teachers (Crooks, 2002).

The National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) is the official secondary school qualification in New Zealand since 2001. NCEA is normally offered to senior high school students – Year 11 through to Year 13. NCEA uses criterion or standard-based assessment. NCEA assessment is administered both at the school level (internal assessment), and at a national level (external assessment, usually examinations). It has three levels.

NCEA replaced the previous secondary school qualifications in a phased change from 2002 to 2004. The key difference between NCEA and the previous qualification framework is that NCEA is a standard- or criterion-based system of assessment, whereas the previous qualifications were norm based. That is, to pass in NCEA, the student must demonstrate a certain level of knowledge (the criterion or standard), whereas, for example, to pass a School Certificate course, the student had to gain a higher grade than at least half of those sitting that course. Understanding of the criterion or standard therefore is essential for academic achievement.

A standard is a module of work in which competence is demonstrated for the standard and associated credits are awarded. Standards in conventional school subjects, which are assessed against three passing grades (achievement, achievement with merit and achievement with excellence), are known as achievement standards. Unit standards were designed for vocational fields and are either achieved or not achieved.

Each assessment contains activities or questions that test each level of achievement, and a candidate must achieve a certain proficiency in each progressive level of achievement before gaining credit for the next level of achievement: for example, a candidate who fails to gain the required amount of Achievement questions correct is not eligible for an Achievement with Merit or Excellence grade, regardless of the amount of Merit or Excellence questions they answered correctly. A failure to gain an achievement grade is reported as not achieved. ESOL students' reading comprehension skills will affect their understanding of the assessment activities or questions, which may impact on their overall grades.

NCEA uses a strict criterion-referenced marking system. The criteria for each grade are made so that the marker looks at the work holistically and decides which level of performance has been achieved. Questions are set so that answers can demonstrate the levels required for achievement, merit or excellence. Therefore, how well ESOL students understand the assessment criteria will greatly impact on their academic achievement.

NCEA was designed to better equip New Zealand secondary school students with skill-based education to compete in the global economy of the modern twenty-first century (Goh, 2005). It is expected to open the door to much greater flexibility in the design of teaching, learning and assessment to meet the needs of all students. However, manageability is a real problem considering the amount of resources required to individually tailor a "pick and mix" course (Goh, 2005). When the mainstream subject teachers have insufficient knowledge of ESOL students' learning needs, the students will be disadvantaged in this new assessment system. How mainstream subject teachers design assessment for ESOL students to match their developing comprehension skills is therefore an important issue.

In New Zealand, the change to NCEA has involved an increase of in-class assessments (unit standards and internally assessed achievement standards). NCEA provides opportunities for formative assessment through the internally administered assessment events that occur throughout the year, which can lead to significant improvement in student achievement when the students have the right to have two attempts at each internally assessed test. However, Hellner (2003) highlighted that NCEA allows teachers to exercise their professional judgments and moderate themselves as they develop, deliver, assess, moderate and report on curriculum and standards-based achievement. Under such circumstances, how well mainstream subject teachers understand ESOL students' learning needs is essential and can greatly impact on their professional judgements as well as ESOL students' learning outcomes.

There has been a tremendous push for continuous assessment in schools to ensure that students are being prepared adequately and to hold both students and teachers accountable for the quality of student preparation. However, it is of concern that the testing methods being used are not the best choices to meet the accountability goal and even have a potential for harming the system (Hunt & Pellegrino, 2002). Many of the current assessment practices that serve certification and prediction functions well are not well suited for improving learning (Broadfoot, 2000). Hunt and Pellegrino argued that teachers need to distinguish between summative tests, which evaluate a student's capabilities at a particular time, and formative tests, which are intended to assist a student (or teacher) in improving a student's capability. Teachers also need to distinguish between disruptive testing, in which evaluation takes place outside the context of normal instruction, and integrated testing, in which testing is conducted unobtrusively, as part of normal classroom activity (Hunt & Pellegrino, 2002).

The development of the new assessment regime (NCEA) has dominated teaching in secondary schools over recent years (Lovell, 2004). Lovell (2004) argues that “an obsession with “valid” assessment, which leads to narrow, dull tasks and lack of student choice, is a problem” (p.93). To survive your teaching, you have to prioritise, and assessment comes first, as a result, I believe that teachers have no choice but to spend much time on assessment driven teaching rather than focus on students’ learning experience. Most of the teachers are caught in conflicts between their own beliefs in what constitutes effective assessment for learning and the values, agendas and structures which are institutionalised in favour of higher-stakes summative assessment (Aitken, 1999).

We know that different forms of assessment encourage different styles of learning. A failure to articulate the relationship between learning and assessment has resulted in a mismatch between the high quality learning described in policy documents as desirable and the poor quality learning that seems likely to result from associated assessment procedures (Gipps, 1994).

It is clear that ESOL students are a group that has distinctively different backgrounds, English competency and learning needs. A clear understanding and appreciation of the distinctive learning needs of ESOL students by their teachers is critical in developing an effective teaching and learning strategy for ESOL students. The presence of ESOL students in large numbers in New Zealand classrooms is a very recent phenomenon, and although many studies have been conducted to determine the different needs of ESOL students, no studies have been done particularly with regard to formative assessment especially in a secondary context.

With formative assessment being such an important component of the learning process, it is obviously important to adopt appropriate and effective formative assessment methods for ESOL students. Although formative assessment has been shown to be effective in enhancing learning in a number of studies, these studies have been mainly conducted in mainstream classes with no special attention paid to the particular needs of ESOL students. Because of the different cultural, up-bringing and language backgrounds of ESOL students, they may have very different perceptions and experiences with regard to different formative assessments from native English speakers. What is proven to be an effective formative assessment method, e.g. self assessment or peer assessment, may or may not be effective for enhancing ESOL students. There is therefore an urgent need to study if the different formative assessment methods that are widely promoted in mainstream classrooms are effective in enhancing the learning of ESOL students. As a first step, this research sets out to study the perceptions and experiences of senior ESOL students in mainstream classrooms with regard to formative assessment. It is hoped that this will provide some insights into the different learning needs of ESOL students with regard to formative assessment.

2.6 Summary

Several themes of importance to the current study have emerged through the review of the literature.

The first point established through the review of the literature is the learning theories to be applied to enhance students' learning. Vygotsky's constructivist theory of learning and development is based on the concept that human activities take place in cultural contexts, are mediated by language and other symbol systems, and can be understood when investigated in

their historical development (Vygotsky, 1978). This emphasis on culture has resulted in the broad use by sociocultural researchers of approaches, which examine the ways in which teaching and learning take place under differing cultural circumstances and in differing historical contexts. Although studies by Natriello (1987), Crooks (1988), Black and Wiliam (1998a), Klecker (2002), McDonald and Boud (2003) and McMillan (2003) suggest that formative assessment can enhance students' learning if it is used appropriately, there is no research to investigate whether this is applicable to students from different cultural backgrounds, especially those students who are from non-English backgrounds.

New Zealand is considered a multicultural country with many ESOL students in mainstream classrooms. This has created a great challenge for teachers to develop effective formative assessment practices in order to enhance students' learning. There is a need for research to find better ways to improve teachers' understanding of ESOL students' needs regarding assessment in mainstream classroom. Constructivist theorists assert that students construct their own knowledge or "truth", and that they therefore have an active role to play in the classroom learning programme. The experiences of formative assessment of ESOL students can give others insight into issues concerning formative assessment which may not be widely recognized. To understand senior ESOL students' perspective on formative assessment, exploring aspects of their experiences and attitudes would be essential. This helped me to establish the concept of asking ESOL students directly for their experiences and attitudes towards formative assessment in mainstream classroom.

This study is aimed at addressing the gap identified in the research by Black and Wiliam (1998a), who called for research to evaluate the performance or validity of some of the new formative assessment approaches under a range of subject settings and for students from all

cultural backgrounds. In New Zealand the increase in internal assessments with the NCEA has provided opportunities for formative assessment through the internally administered assessment events that occur throughout the year. More teachers are recognising the value of internal assessment practices as a meaningful way to assist students to monitor their progress towards achieving components of the standard. Although NCEA provides more opportunities for formative assessment, no research has been done to investigate the impact of NCEA on the learning of student with diverse cultural and language backgrounds. The literature review has identified the need for a study of formative assessment from the learner's point of view, and with learners from different cultural backgrounds.

Research design elements for this study were carefully considered and decisions were made based on the research questions, as well as being related to the findings of the literature review. The design and methodology of the study are discussed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER THREE:

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

3.1 Introduction

This chapter describes and discusses the qualitative methodology used to conduct this study and the methods used in the research process. Procedures by which the data were generated and analysed are described. Issues relating to ethics are also discussed.

3.2 Research Methodology

The decision to adopt a qualitative methodology to this study has been informed by several reasons. First of all, the aim of qualitative research is to illuminate an experience or understanding for others, but, unlike quantitative research, not to generalise from it (Mutch, 2005). Bogdan and Biklen (2003) define five features of qualitative research:

1. Qualitative research has actual setting as the direct source of data and the researcher is the key instrument.
2. Qualitative research is descriptive. The written results of the research contain quotations from the data to illustrate and substantiate the presentation.
3. Qualitative researchers are concerned with process rather than simply with outcome or products.
4. Qualitative researchers tend to analyse their data inductively. They do not search out data or evidence to prove or disprove hypotheses they hold before entering the study; rather through emergent data collection, they are constructing a picture that takes a shape.

5. Qualitative researchers are concerned with what are called participant perspectives. How different people make sense of their lives is their major interest (p.4-7).

The focus of my research is the experiences and attitudes of ESOL students. In order to discover what these experiences and attitudes are, it is necessary to engage with ESOL students in ways that will elicit insights into these two areas. It is clear that a qualitative methodology is the most appropriate way to do this.

As a teacher in a secondary school, I am keen to see my research have some impact on my practice. Burns (2000) suggests qualitative reports are not presented as statistical summations, but rather in a more descriptive style, this type of research might be of particular benefit to me as an ordinary teacher who does not have knowledge of sophisticated measurement techniques. Burns (2000) also suggested that the close connection between qualitative research and teaching might also inspire teachers to become involved in research so that the results of studies might lead more expediently into new decisions for action. This adds further weight to my decision to use a qualitative methodology.

Thomas (1998) suggests that the choice of an investigative method depends on the nature of the particular question the investigator hopes to answer. In this study, the aim to describe ESOL students' experiences and attitudes towards formative assessment in mainstream classrooms determines that the most appropriate methodology will be one from the interpretive paradigm. This qualitative methodology can fulfil the promise of describing how senior ESOL students construct their understanding of formative assessment and feelings towards formative assessment in mainstream classrooms as they relate to their experiences of formative assessment.

Achieving the aims of this study required the ability to access the experience of the participants. To accomplish this, a phenomenological approach was chosen.

Phenomenological studies have become an important research method when one needs to understand specific phenomena in depth (Patton, 1990). Bogdan and Biklen (2003) point out that “researchers in the phenomenological approach do not assume they know what things mean to the people they are studying but attempt to gain entry into the conceptual world of their subjects in order to understand how and what meaning they construct around events in their daily lives” (p. 23). They believe that multiple ways of interpreting experiences are available to each of us through interacting with others.

Qualitative methodology also fits the theoretical grounding of my research in constructivism. In this study of ESOL students’ experiences and attitudes in mainstream classrooms, the researcher’s interpretation is just one of many possible and throughout the data collecting phase, the researcher and the participants jointly construct knowledge. There is no single interpretive truth that qualitative interpretations of research data are constructed (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Denzin and Lincoln (2000) also comment on the multi-method focus of qualitative research that “the use of multiple methods, or triangulation, reflects an attempt to secure an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in question” (p. 5). Internal and external validity which are features of positivist and post-positivist approaches are replaced in constructivism by concepts of trustworthiness and authenticity (Silverman, 1993). In this study, the methods of data collection reflect the constructivist and interpretive approach to understanding the world from the point of view of the participants.

The trustworthiness of qualitative research is often questioned by positivists (Shenton, 2004). Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that ensuring credibility is one of the most important factors

in establishing trustworthiness. Triangulation may involve the use of different methods (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000), but Shenton (2004) suggests that the use of a wide range of informants could be another form of triangulation. Although much qualitative research involves the use of purposive sampling, “a random approach may negate charges of researcher bias in the selection of participants. A random sampling procedure provides the greatest assurance that those selected are a representative sample of the larger group” (Shenton, 2004, p. 65). However, a significant disadvantage of the random method is that the researcher has no control over the choice of informants, as a result, uncooperative or inarticulate individuals may be selected (Shenton, 2004). In this study, it would have been impossible to gain sufficient data from participants with very limited English if they had been randomly selected. Therefore, the capability of answering the research questions was the main criteria for the sampling selection in this study.

I chose a questionnaire as the first data gathering instrument in order to randomly select participants from a wider group of ESOL students who have been in secondary school for more than a year. This strategy was used to ensure that the participants not only have had enough experiences in the mainstream secondary classroom in New Zealand but also had an adequate level of English to understand the questions. The questionnaire enabled me to obtain data from a large number of students in order to gain greater knowledge of ESOL students’ experiences and attitudes. More details regarding sampling procedure, questionnaire and interview design are discussed in the section (3.3) of Research Design.

I used Likert scale items in the questionnaire to gather student-self-reported data from a wide range of participants. This provided data that gave some numerical insights. However, the questionnaire also had open-ended questions in the end for any thoughts or experiences that

participants would like to share. Following the questionnaire, semi-structured interviews were conducted. The use of semi-structured interviews allowed the participants to describe their experiences and attitudes more in detail. Qualitative interviewing is a way of finding out what others feel and think about their worlds and understanding can be achieved by encouraging participants to describe their worlds in their own terms (Rubin & Rubin, 1995).

A questionnaire followed by semi-structured interviews formed the core of the approach. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) described triangulation as using different data generation methods to enable consistency of findings. The use of different methods of data generation enable various responses about senior ESOL students' experiences and attitudes to be presented in a useful and pragmatic way, which strengthens the trustworthiness of the study and reinforces the notion that multiple sources of data could lead to a deeper understanding of the phenomena being studied (Allan, 1991).

Brannen (1992) suggests that qualitative investigation gives as much attention to internal as to external factors that influence a person's actions or responses. The interaction between the researcher and the participants was unpredictable during the interviews. Group semi-structured interview can also bring together people with varied opinions (Cohen et al., 2000). The interaction between the participants and with the researcher also provided more opportunities to understand the participants' responses. This mixed method approach combined with my own reflections as a researcher enabled me to ascertain the trustworthiness of the data collected as "authenticity" rather than reliability, which is often the issue in qualitative research (Silverman, 1993).

The methodological approach taken in this study had a number of limitations, which may be common to all qualitative research, e.g. data reduction difficulties, trustworthiness, and procedures not being standardised (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). These authors also suggested that qualitative research could be very rigorous when the researcher was able to demonstrate an understanding of a perfect fit between the data and explanations of social phenomena. An analytic induction process, which forced the researcher to refine and qualify theories and propositions: what was done and why it was done this way rather than applying a set rules, could achieve this (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). More details are discussed in the section of issues.

3.3 Research Design

The key research question in this study asked what senior ESOL students' experiences of and attitudes towards formative assessment in mainstream classroom are. I chose a questionnaire as the first data gathering instrument in order to obtain data from as many students as possible in the limited period of time. The available time to administer the questionnaire or interview students was restricted by students' and their teachers' busy schedules. The questionnaire enabled me to collect data from a large number of students which could not be obtained by either individual or group interviews.

The design of the research questions in both questionnaire and interview was closely related to the findings of the literature review on formative assessment. Questions regarding use of formative assessment strategies were drafted based on the strategies identified by Black and Wiliam (1999) and Clarke et al.(2003).

The qualitative data gathered in this study were particularly useful in providing a record of the voices of the participants. Silverman (1993) suggests that interviews offer an apparently ‘deeper’ picture than the variable-based correlations of quantitative studies. As the research progressed, I found that I had to adapt the design to the circumstances. More details are discussed in the following sections.

3.3.1 Participant Selection

There are many sampling strategies used in qualitative research. Qualitative samples tend to be purposely selected rather than randomly selected (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Purposeful sampling is “used as a strategy when one wants to understand something about certain select cases without needing to generalise to all such cases” (Neville, Willis & Edwards, 1994, p.7). In regarding to the size of the sample, Patton suggests “there are no rules for sample size in qualitative researches, it depends on what you want to know, the purpose of the inquiry, and what can be done with available time and resources” (Patton, 1990, p.184). The sample strategy in this study was designed such to complement the larger number of participants in the questionnaire with the more in-depth interview of a smaller group of participants. This way I could both gauge the diverse range of views from the larger group and gain insights of a selected smaller group with the time and resources available.

The population for this study was all the Year 11 to Year 13 ESOL students (who have to be attending ESOL classes currently) from five public state secondary schools in a large urban centre. It included migrants, fee-paying international students, and refugees as detailed in section 2.4. The participants had to have been in a New Zealand secondary school for more than a year to ensure that they had enough experiences in the mainstream secondary

classroom in New Zealand. It was also to ensure that the participants had an adequate level of English to understand the questions.

For logistical and cost reasons, the gathering of data for this study was restricted to one city. After sending consent letters to six selected schools, only one school agreed to participate in this research. This lack of response led me to take a different approach to inviting participation in my study. I sent information letters to all the public schools in the city. The response was still very limited and only four more schools were willing to participate. As a result, I took whoever was willing to participate instead of randomly selecting participants as originally intended. Despite this change, a large number of students were involved in this study and they came from different cultural backgrounds representing the majority of ethnic groups of ESOL students in secondary mainstream classes in New Zealand (Ministry of Education, 2006; Statistics New Zealand, 2002). In the end, five state secondary schools gave me the consent to conduct this research. There were one boys', one girls', and three co-educational schools. Private schools were not selected because in general they have a different system regarding resource, class size, and staffing. I believe that class size affects teaching approaches that teachers use, including formative assessment. Therefore, this study focused on senior ESOL students in state schools being taught in similar sized classes.

All Year 11 to Year 13 ESOL students from the five schools were invited to participate in this research. A total number of 153 ESOL students were invited to participate. One hundred and twenty one students returned the signed consent form indicating they were willing to participate. Some of these students could not get their guardian's form signed and therefore couldn't participate. Seventeen students did not attend when the questionnaire was administered and so automatically withdrew from this research. One hundred and four senior

ESOL students participated in the research questionnaire. I discarded 4 questionnaires because the responses were inappropriate for the question. In the end, the questionnaire data were collected from 100 participants.

Twenty seven students were invited for the interview. There were seven Korean, seven Chinese, eight Thai and five Japanese. However, two Thai students and one Japanese student did not come for the interview, therefore twenty four students were interviewed in four groups in the end with one ethnic group from each school. Details of the interview selection are discussed in section 3.3.3.

3.3.2 Questionnaire Design

Questionnaires and surveys have long played a role in language testing research as a means of gathering (typically quantitative) background information in order to examine the relationship of particular variables to outcomes (Lumley & Brown, 2005). Depending on the degree of freedom permitted for responses, questionnaires may also contribute qualitative data when open-ended questions allow respondents to give a clear picture of their experiences (Brown, 2004). Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000) suggest that attention needs to be given to the questionnaire itself, the approaches that are made to the respondents, the explanations that are given to the respondents, the data analysis and the data reporting. Factors which might impact on every stage of the use of a questionnaire were carefully considered and the details are discussed in the following.

Considering ESOL students' potentially limited understanding of English, a questionnaire was used to give participants enough time to respond to questions with the help of their

bilingual dictionary. The questionnaire could also be completed anonymously and it allowed participants to take as much time as they needed to complete it. It was also an efficient way of gathering data from a large number of participants at times convenient for their timetables. I did not use the terminology “formative assessment” in the questionnaire because I was concerned that the participants might not understand the meaning. Instead, I described specific assessment activities and asked participants to respond to these.

Ten students from Year 11 to Year 13 were invited from my own school to complete the questionnaire first. This initial sample group acted as a pilot study to check clarity of the questions, the language used in the questionnaire and the appropriateness of the data gathering procedures. They provided useful feedback which led me to amend some questions for clarity and some changes where possible before using them in the real research. In fact, only four students came for the pilot study because of other school activities. There were three year 11 students and one year 13 student. These four students were from four different ethnic groups: Chinese, Japanese, Korean and Vietnamese. These four students were not included in the on-going research and the pilot data were also not included.

I administered the questionnaires at lunch time in two schools and at class time in three schools. The questionnaires were completed by the participants in their classrooms in the presence of both their teacher and me. Although I am a registered teacher, in this study, my role is a researcher. Therefore, I had to be accompanied by a classroom teacher in class according to the school policy. I introduced myself briefly and gave each participant a code before they started answering the questions to ensure confidentiality. I also explained the instructions and some of the terminology words used in the questionnaire. The participants were allowed to use their bilingual dictionary to check any word in the questionnaire they did

not understand. They were also encouraged to ask me questions. After the first school completed the questionnaire, I quickly went through the responses. I could see that some participants might have misunderstood the questions because of their limited understanding of English. From the second school, some examples were given to explain some of the instructions or words to help the participants understand the questions better. However, despite my effort, some participants still responded in a way that indicated they did not understand the instructions or questions clearly.

I considered issues relating to the question sequence when designing the questionnaire. Neuman (1997) suggests that questions should be sequenced to minimise the discomfort and confusion of respondents. After an introduction explaining the survey, it is best to start with easy-to-answer questions in order to help the respondents to feel comfortable about the questionnaire (Neuman, 1997). This questionnaire consisted of three parts: the first part had questions on general information followed by questions on experience and the last part had questions on attitudes (see Appendix C). The wording in the questionnaire was tailored to ESOL students with limited understanding of English based on my teaching experience of ESOL. The responses required in the questionnaire were straightforward and brief. Most of the questions only required a tick or a number to respond. The participants were reminded about the purpose of the research and confidentiality in a paragraph at the beginning of the questionnaire. It was also made clear that the participation was voluntary and their opinions were valued.

Part one of the questionnaire started with general data about participants' background such as language background, year level etc. Parts two and three consisted of Likert scale items that required learners to self-report on some aspect of their experiences and attitudes. The

questions were designed to reflect the self-reported nature of the data. Because assessments become formative when the information is used to adapt teaching and learning to meet student needs, it is not actually possible to judge whether it is a formative assessment by observation in the classroom. Therefore, questions were designed to use specific formative assessment activities identified by Clarke et al. (2003) as well as Black and Wiliam's (1999) so that participants could report their own experience and attitudes of formative assessment in mainstream classrooms. The questionnaire finished with some open-ended questions in part three to contribute some qualitative data. This self-report method requires ability of self-reflection on what they did, what they thought and how they felt regarding assessment activities used in mainstream classroom. Concerns on participants' capacity of self-reflection are discussed in the section of issues.

The Likert items provided useful information which was simple to code and count allowing comparison across all the participants. The open questions were designed to provide more detailed information which could be followed up in the interviews. The questionnaire finished with a question inviting participants to add further questions or comments if they wished.

I used the five key factors of effective formative assessment identified by past research (Black & Wiliam, 1999) and the strategies suggested by Clarke et al. (2003) to design the questions on the following key areas:

- establishing learning target;
- sharing assessment criteria;
- questioning;
- feedback;

- self-assessment;
- peer-assessment.

I discarded some questionnaires because the responses were inappropriate for the questions. However, when the participants chose the middle box for every statement for the Likert scale items, I decided to retain those data because I had no evidence to show that this was not actually what the participants thought or simply they could not make up their mind for the responses. There were also some open-ended questions at the end of these questionnaires which could provide useful data.

3.3.3 Interview

Interviews have much in common with open-ended questionnaires, and are commonly used where qualitative descriptions of learning and assessment contexts are required (Brown, 2005). They can take many forms and, depending on the aims of the research, may be more or less structured, allowing freedom to follow up individual responses or topics. The type of interview selected will, to an extent, depend on the nature of the topic and the purpose of the interview. Once I have decided what I need to know, a decision will have to be made about the type of interview which is most likely to produce the information required (Bell, 1993). I used semi-structured interviewing to gather data about different experiences and attitudes of the participants. This face to face encounter between the researcher and the informants is a recommended approach to understand participants' perspectives on their lives, experiences, or situation as expressed in their own words (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998).

The structured interview is like a questionnaire which is administered face-to-face with a respondent (Denscombe, 1998), and offers very little flexibility in the way in which questions are asked or answered. Unstructured interviewing can provide greater breadth (Fontana & Frey, 2005), however, it was considered inappropriate for this research because of ESOL students' limited English. It would be not only time-consuming but also difficult for ESOL students to start a free flowing conversation while there could be language barriers between the participants and the researcher. Some researchers tend to rely on interpreters, which will not only create financial demands but also may add layers of meanings, biases and interpretations that could lead to disastrous misunderstandings (Fontana & Frey, 2005).

I used the semi-structured interviews for this study. The interviews were structured in the sense that all participants were asked essentially the same questions in the same order. It was unstructured in the sense that the participants' responses were used to further probe and clarify the participants' understanding, attitudes, and experiences of formative assessment in mainstream classrooms. The semi-structured group interview is essentially a qualitative data-gathering technique that relies on the systematic questioning of several individuals simultaneously in a formal or informal setting (Fontana & Frey, 2005). Group interviews have some advantages over individual interviews such as: relatively inexpensive to conduct and often produce rich data that are cumulative and elaborative; can be stimulating for respondents and so aid in recall; and the format is flexible. Group interviews can also be used for triangulation purposes or used in conjunction with other data-gathering techniques (Fontana & Frey, 2005). Therefore, semi-structured group interviews were used and a list of questions was provided before the interview so that participants could check their understanding of the questions with the help of their peers or the researcher before they prepared their answers. This not only helped the participants overcome the language

difficulty but also helped them increase their confidence in answering questions. The guide questions also helped me to focus on the crucial issues of the study and at the same time participants were encouraged and given the freedom to provide more responses when I probed or referred back to their previous answers in a less formal atmosphere. This helped to ensure that the participants' perception of reality was clarified and clearly understood (Burns, 2000), otherwise I could have made assumptions about what the participants really meant.

The data obtained from the semi-structured interviews could offer additional insights into the ESOL students' experiences and attitudes towards formative assessment because it gave the opportunity for interaction between the researcher and the students. It also gave the opportunity for the researcher to check participants' understanding of formative assessment.

The costs associated with the translation of interview data made it unrealistic to include participants from a large number of different ethnic groups and interview them in their native language to avoid the language barrier. In my proposal I had intended to conduct one interview in English with a group of selected participants and one interview in Chinese with a group of Chinese participants. However, after finding out the participants' limited English in answering the questionnaire, I was concerned about the potential language barrier. I reconsidered my initial plan and decided to conduct group interviews with one ethnic group from each school so that the participants could discuss in their own language as well as help each other with their English when they answered my questions. Interviews in small groups allowed for interaction and the participants could spark ideas off each other. I also believe that the participants felt more comfortable and at ease to talk about the interview questions in their own languages. The level of discussion in each interview confirmed my decision to interview different language groups separately.

As most of the participants were Asian, the four largest ethnic groups were selected for the interview. These were Chinese, Korean, Thai and Japanese. The interviews were conducted in English. However, because I am a native Chinese speaker, I gave the Chinese participants the option of using Chinese or English. It was interesting that they discussed their ideas in Chinese but reported to me in English.

All interviews were conducted at the participants' schools in a room where the interview would not be easily interrupted by other people or by other activities around the school. Two interviews were conducted at lunch time and the other two during class time. Each interview was semi-structured and guided in nature. Care was taken to pursue key areas relevant to formative assessment. Participants were asked to share their experiences and thoughts regarding formative assessment as well as being given the opportunity to ask questions and give suggestions.

Issues relating to the question sequence were considered while designing the interview as Fontana and Frey (2005) notes that there are three sources of errors in an interview. One is the sequence and wording of the questions. Six interview questions (see Appendix D) were given to the participants in writing at the beginning of the interview so that they could discuss them first, check their understanding of the questions, and help each other with English. The aim of the interview was to provide insights into the ESOL students' experiences and attitudes towards formative assessment. There was no point in asking participants about formative assessment directly as they did not necessarily have any understanding of the term "formative assessment". Therefore, the first two questions were designed to enhance the participants' understanding of formative assessment. A definition of formative assessment was explained

by giving some examples. Then the participants were asked to give examples of formative assessment used in their classes and explain the difference between formative assessment and summative assessment. The interview did not start until I was sure that all the participants had some understanding of formative assessment.

Questions about personal experiences are generally the easiest ones for a respondent to answer and are a good place to begin to get the interviewee talking comfortably (Glesne, 1999). Questions about formative assessment activities used in the classroom were asked after I was sure that students had some understanding of formative assessment. Questions about comments on the effectiveness or attitudes followed after the questions regarding students' experiences. Sometimes I explained the questions using a scenario to help participants' understanding as well as to develop rapport with them. The interview closed with an opportunity for participants to add anything they wished to discuss or ask.

The interviews were taped to enable subsequent checking of responses and to have a reliable record of the data for analysis. I constantly asked the participants to define and clarify their responses in order to ensure the accuracy of interpretation of the transcripts later on. Since the participants were ESOL students, I employed a range of techniques to encourage answers. These included verbal and non-verbal responses such as nodding, smiling and making general sounds of agreement. However, in order to overcome the language barrier, verbal techniques were used more frequently, for example repeating or rephrasing participants' answers, asking probing questions or summarising key points of the answers.

3.4 Data Analysis

3.4.1 Questionnaire

For each school, I counted the number of responses for each category of the Likert Scale, then I tallied the counts together for each category in a table for all the participants from different schools. I added the numbers together and presented them in another table for every question. I then calculated the percentages for each category and summarised the data in a separate table. I analysed this data and highlighted significant and meaningful trends and comparisons. In the thesis, some of the data are presented in figures so that the trends can be seen more easily. Some of the data are presented in a table for easy comparison.

3.4.2 Interview

The interviews were taped and transcripts were typed, with each being given a letter to represent each school in case I needed to go back to check for accuracy.

Although it was time-consuming, I chose to transcribe the transcripts myself so as to allow me to be familiar with the material in the interviews. I assigned a colour to represent each of the themes I was seeking in both the interview and the questionnaire data. I used a highlighter pen to colour the words, some of them supporting more than one theme. Then I created a table under the five categories used to probe participants' experiences of formative assessment: name of activities; experience; understanding; attitude; and reasons. The categories were identified from the research questions and reading the data notes. I then transcribed the coloured participants' responses to the table under the right category. This was very helpful with the data analysis process and writing of the thesis as I was able to take an overview of all the data at once.

3.5 Issues

Careful attention was given to ethical issues in this study. A key ethical requirement was the reassurance of confidentiality where necessary. “The obligation to protect the anonymity of research participants and to keep research data confidential is all-inclusive.”(Cohen et al., 2000, p.61). Participants were assured of confidentiality. All the participants were given a code to use instead of their name for the questionnaire and they were reassured that names would not be used during the group interview. Statements from the interview reported in this thesis cannot be traced back to individual students. However, a total anonymity was not possible in the group interviews as the participants knew each other.

A second key requirement for ethical research is that ‘subjects agree voluntarily to participate’ and that their agreement is based on ‘full and open information’ (Christians, 2005, p.154). Therefore, effort was made to ensure that explanatory information (see Appendix A) and consent forms (see Appendix B) were sent to and signed by all the participants, and their parents or guardians where the participant was under 18 years old. Information letters were also sent to the principals of each school. Information provided included the aims of the research, methods, complaints procedure and confidentiality. Only I had access to all the data and findings, which are only used for this thesis and any related conference papers, journal articles or reports drawn from the thesis. All completed questionnaires and taped interviews are kept in a secure place.

Ensuring that data are accurate is a cardinal principle in social science codes (Christians, 2005). There were factors in this study which potentially constrained and limited the data collection. One of these is my role as a teacher. I was concerned that the participants might

feel constrained by my role as a teacher. I, therefore, used my current students only for the pilot study, and this material was not included in the research data. For the participants from other schools and my previous students from my own school, I emphasised my role as a researcher and the confidentiality of this research. My perception is that the participants approached this research with openness and honesty which indicates that this possible constraint was unfounded.

A danger in any research is that the researcher imposes his or her own view on the research results. Webb (1997) questions the ability of the researcher to have pristine perception, make neutral observations, build objective categories and give neutral interpretations: each of these activities is informed by theory and prejudice. I acknowledge this and I am aware of such biases. As an ESOL teacher I wish to strongly advocate for ESOL students' needs in the mainstream classroom and influence what mainstream teachers do. Therefore, I have endeavoured to present data in such a way as to enable the reader to draw his/her own conclusions. Open-ended questions with semi-structured interviews were used in this research in order to minimise this bias. The interviews also provided the opportunity to hear the students' own voice, which could provide richer data with more details than the questionnaire could provide.

It was important to gain the participants' trust, and let them see that I strongly believed in the value of this study and really needed their help to make it successful. My approach to achieve this was to spend a little time explaining the research project before the questionnaire and interviews. In fact, I found that most of the participants were comfortable to answer my questions during the interviews. Spending a little time with the participants for a chat before the interview helped to establish a relaxed atmosphere and encouraged them to respond.

Another possible limitation of the study is the time that was available to conduct the research. According to Burns (2000) one of the major limitations of qualitative research is the time required for data collection, analysis and interpretation. This research was a one-year full-time course, but I was only granted a half-year study leave. I planned to do as much as possible during my study leave because I have found it is very difficult to juggle full-time teaching and part-time study. All the participants and their teachers were busy enough with their own work, so it was quite difficult to arrange my research time to fit within their existing commitments. As a result, I did not have the time to transcribe each interview before conducting the next one. The initial interview questions provided a useful starting point, however, I believe that it would have been better to have completed the transcription after each interview in order to identify issues which could have been explored in the next one. A useful lesson for me as this research proceeded was that events did not always go as planned and I needed to be more flexible to accommodate this.

A further possible limitation of this study is the potential language barrier, especially in the interviews. Efforts were made to avoid this barrier and interviews were designed in a group interview with one ethnic group from each school. This had the effect of limiting the participants involved in the interviews to only four ethnic groups. Because of the very limited time of my study leave, I did not have the time to go back to the participants to check my interpretation of the interview transcripts.

The development of the phenomenological study was dependent on participants' ability to describe their experiences of and attitudes towards formative assessment in mainstream classrooms. It demanded participants to reflect on what they did, what they thought and how

they felt regarding formative assessment activities used in mainstream classrooms. This kind of self-report method would require some measure of self-reflection. Although the use of a phenomenological approach was appropriate to the aims of this research, the willingness of the participants to provide accurate and honest information on their experiences and attitudes, and the participants' capacity of self-reflections are other concerns in the study.

3.6 Summary

The instruments used were a questionnaire in five schools and semi-structured interviews with four different ethnic groups in four schools. The population was Year 11 to Year 13 ESOL students who had been in New Zealand secondary schools for more than a year from five public secondary schools. Samples were 100 Year 11 to Year 13 ESOL students, which were randomly selected by returning their signed consent forms. Participants involved in the interviews were selected based on the nature of the top largest ethnic groups of ESOL students in mainstream classrooms in those five schools.

Data from the questionnaires were analysed for overall trends and possible differences. The interview themes were analysed for possible trends and reasons that might explain participants' attitudes. Ethical issues were carefully considered throughout the whole process of the research. The results of this research are presented in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

4.1 Introduction

The data gathered from the questionnaires and interviews were analysed and considered under headings related to the research questions. The results of this analysis are reported and illustrated in figures and tables in this chapter. Possible explanations and implications of the findings will be discussed in Chapter Five.

4.2 General information

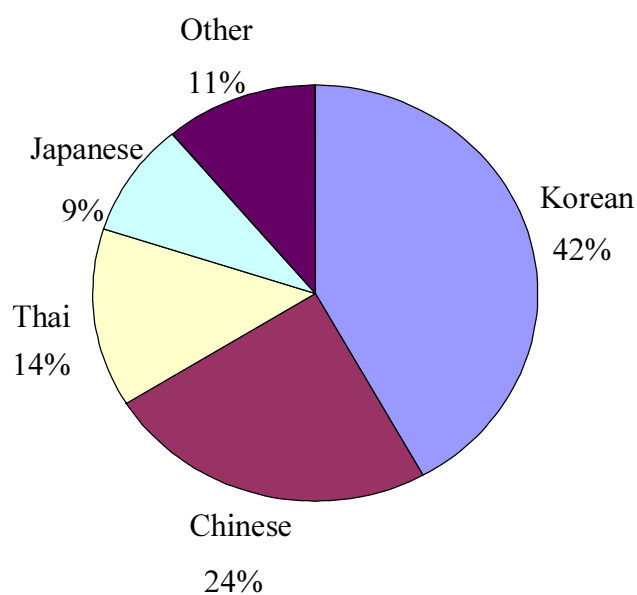


Figure 4.1 Nationalities of the participants.

One hundred ESOL students participated in the questionnaire of this research, 37 year-11 students, 37 year-12 students and 26 year-13 students. These included 42% Koreans, 24% Chinese, 14% Thai, 9% Japanese and 11% from other ethnic groups (Indian, Parkistan,

Malaysian, Jordan, Cambodian, Kurdish, Somalia, Chilean, Russian) (Figure 4.1). The largest group of participants was Korean students. The second largest group was Chinese. This reflects the secondary school ESOL student population and is a representative sample of Asian students. It included migrants, refugees and fee-paying international students.

Twenty two different subjects were chosen by the participants to use as their focus for answering the questions in the questionnaire. Forty six percent of the students chose their favourite subject as their focus for the questionnaire.

4.3 Understanding of Formative Assessment

The questionnaire did not use the term formative assessment directly, but used descriptions of assessment activities summarised from Black and Wiliam (1999) and Clark (2003), to which participants responded. When I asked the interview participants whether they knew what formative assessment was, all shook their heads and remained silent except one participant. In fact all participants had experienced some formative assessment in class before but did not know the terminology; therefore they simply could not understand the phrase. In each interview, after I explained to them by using some examples, participants came up with some ideas such as:

“The one before the real test; has no mark; normal test in class but won’t be recorded in the report; like a practice test ---”.

I used more examples to explain until all participants raised their hands to indicate that they had some understanding of formative assessment. Participants from each interview came up with a statement:

“Formative assessment is like that after the test, teachers use the information for teaching so that they know what students are good at and what they are not. Summative assessment is only used for report to tell parents and students about what they have achieved.”

Participants gradually understood formative assessment much better when they were trying to identify activities used in class which could be formative assessment. Participants identified the following activities used in class with their explanations on why they believed they were formative assessment:

“Asking questions to check students’ understanding in order to help students understand better.”

“Practice test, after the test, teacher gives feedback on how to improve.”

“Use past year’s exam paper to go over the answers and help the students understand the topic better.”

“Giving feedback on what need to be done after checking students’ ideas or work.”

4.4 Experience of Formative Assessment

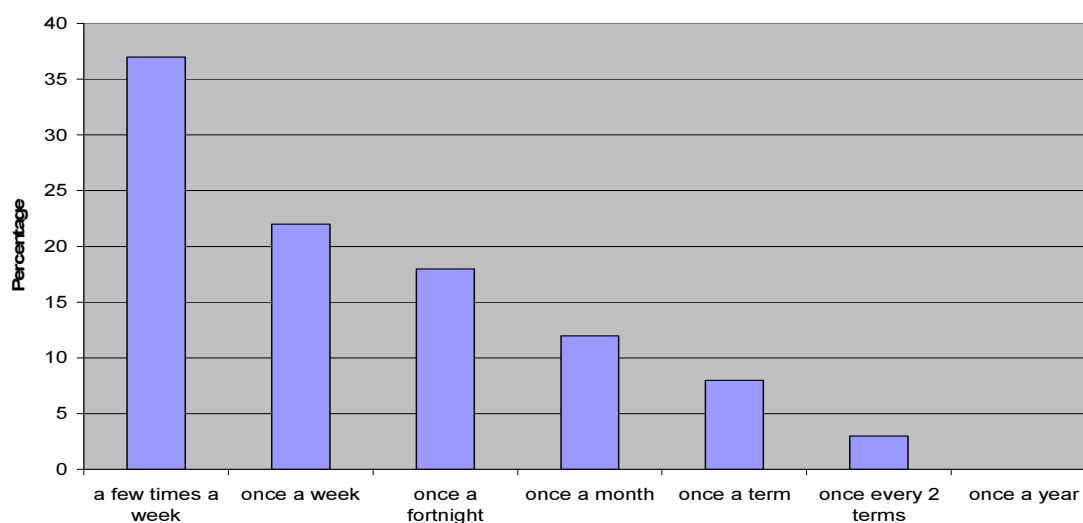


Figure 4.2 Frequency of assessments

In terms of the frequency of assessment in general, which could include both formative and summative, 59% of the participants were assessed at least once a week, while only 8% of the participants were assessed once a term (Figure 4.2). The participants reported that they were assessed frequently, which probably reflects the current focus on assessment in New Zealand senior secondary classrooms.

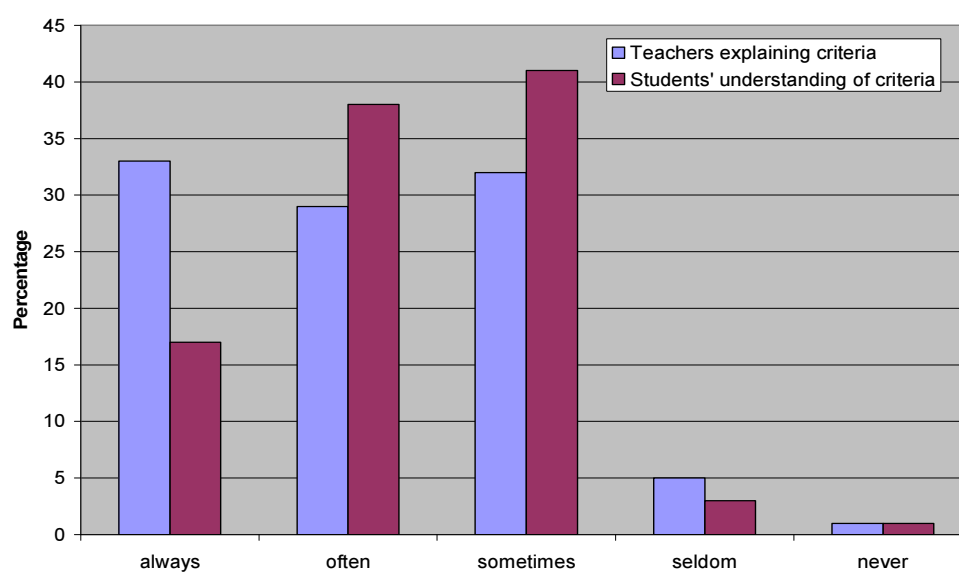


Figure 4.3 Frequency of teachers' explanation and students' understanding of criteria.

The importance of sharing learning objectives with students to enhance learning (Black & Wiliam, 1998b) is becoming more widely recognised and practised, and is to be encouraged as a useful strategy of formative assessment. Over 50% of the participants stated that their teachers always or often told them the learning objectives at the beginning of the lesson, whilst another 32% believed that their teachers told them only sometimes (Figure 4.3). Fifty five percent of the participants always or often understood the assessment criteria in order to reach their learning objectives. On the other hand, more than 41% of the participants only understood these assessment criteria sometimes. These figures suggest that while teachers may explain criteria and objectives, they may not always ensure that the learning objectives and the assessment criteria are clear to ESOL students.

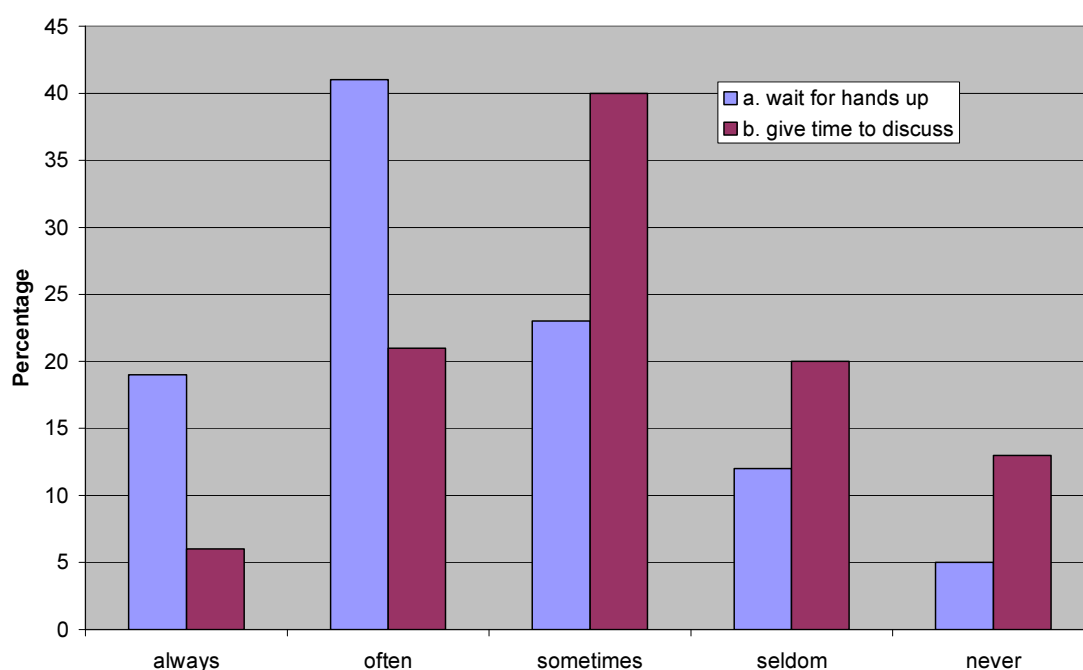


Figure 4.4 Frequency of two strategies used by teachers for encouraging students' responses to questions.

Wait-time after a question is recommended so students have time to think. An opportunity to discuss with peers before answering questions is also beneficial (Black & Wiliam, 2002).

Sixty percent of the participants responded that their teachers often or always waited for a few

hands-up, then picked one of them to answer (Figure 4.4). While wait time may be adequate, it seems that there are much fewer opportunities for students to discuss their responses before being called on to answer. Only six percent of the participants responded that their teachers always gave them time to discuss before giving answers, while twenty-one percent of the participants were often given time to discuss. Whilst the practice of asking a question and then picking one of those whose hands are up may be appropriate for mainstream students, it may not necessarily be the best approach for ESOL students because of language barriers and attitudes towards participating in classroom activities. It may be more appropriate to give them time to discuss before asking someone to answer the question so that they have a better understanding of the question and are better prepared to answer the question. It is generally recognised that giving students time to discuss is conducive to enhancing understanding and learning (Vygotsky, 1978).

Table 4.1 Feedback on assessment or work

Feedback methods	Percentage				
	always	Often	sometimes	seldom	never
a. Mark or a grade only	14	31	23.5	23.5	8
b. Specific advice on what I can do	22	34	28	12	4
c. Non-specific comments	20	31	31	11	7
d. Tick or date only	5	11	18	30	36
e. Oral feedback	5	7	35	30	23

Giving specific feedback on work or assessment is considered one of the effective formative assessment methods in helping students learning. Table 4.1 shows that in this study, 56% of the participants always or often got specific advice on their work while 51% of the

participants always or often got non-specific comments on their work. Given the importance of feedback, it is a little surprising that half the participants report that they receive a lack of specific feedback.

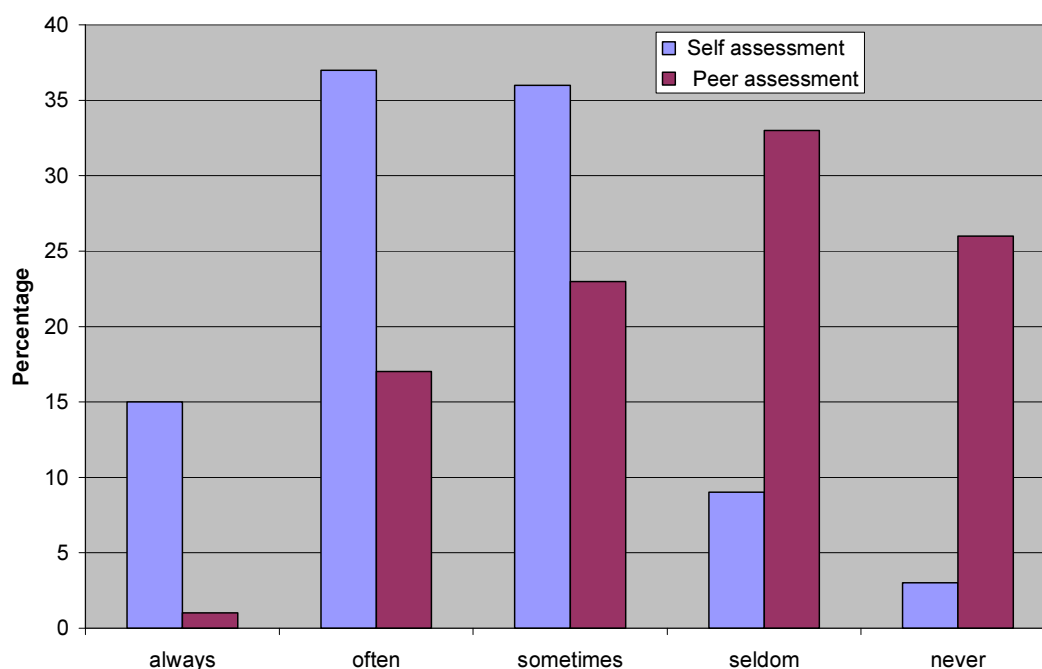


Figure 4.5 Frequency of self assessment and peer assessment.

Self assessment and peer assessment are identified in the literature as important and effective forms of formative assessment. In this study, 52% of the participants reported high levels of self assessment, but only 18 % of the participants always or often experienced peer assessment (Figure 4.5). It appears that peer assessment is not widely used at a senior secondary level.

4.5 Attitude towards Formative Assessment

4.5.1 Data from Questionnaire

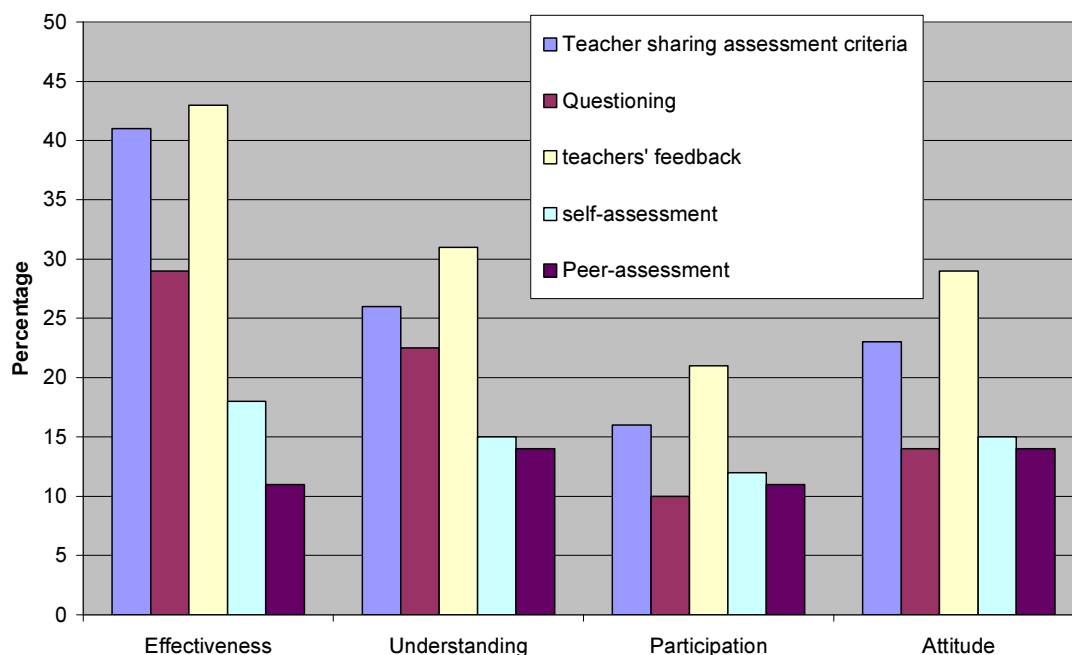


Figure 4.6. Comparison of five commonly used formative assessment methods.

Of the five formative assessment methods that the participants were asked to give feedback on, ‘teacher giving feedback on student work or assessment’ was judged the highest in every category assessed, including effectiveness in helping student learning, understanding of activity, willingness to participate and attitudes towards activities (Figure 4.6). The next most useful method was ‘teacher sharing assessment criteria with the students’. Interestingly, peer assessment received the lowest score in terms of effectiveness in helping student learning, understanding and attitude towards the activity. Although ‘questioning’ received the third highest rank in terms of effectiveness and understanding, it was ranked the lowest in terms of students’ willingness to participate. Self assessment was only slightly favoured over peer assessment.

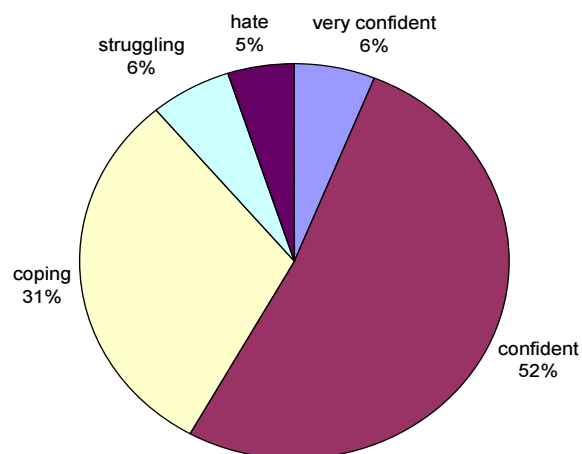


Figure 4.7 Feelings towards assessments in general

When participants were asked about how they felt about assessment in classrooms in general, nearly 60% of the participants felt confident in assessment at school in general, while more than 31% of the participants felt that they were coping, 6% felt struggling and 5% said that they hated assessment at school (Figure 4.7).

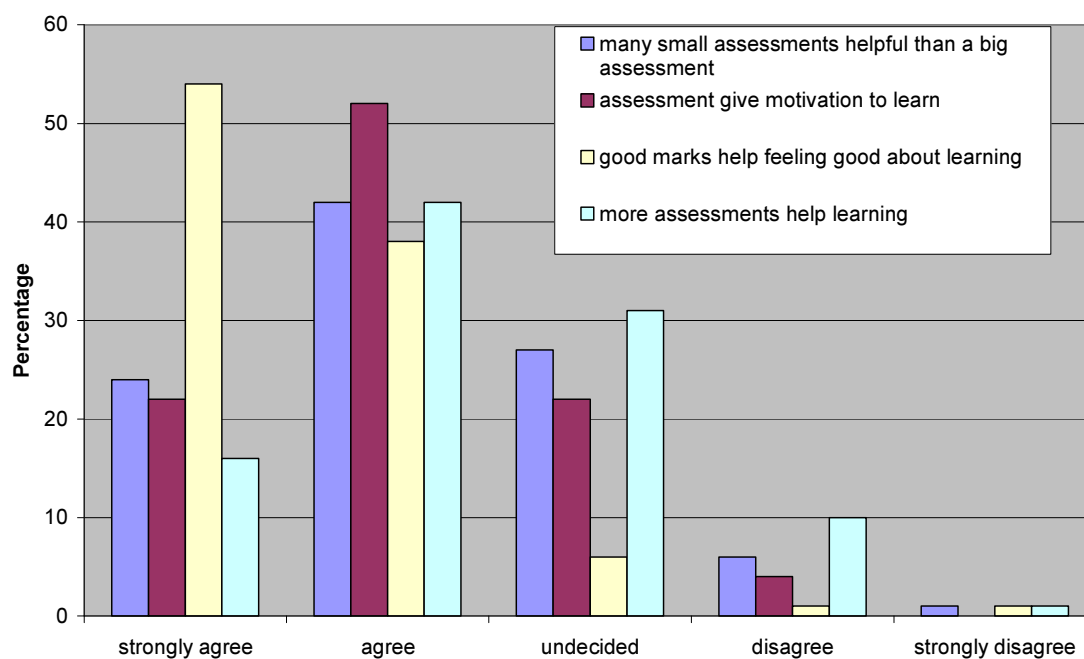


Figure 4.8. Attitudes towards assessment in general

In terms of what may influence students' attitude towards assessment, a large proportion (92%) of the participants responded that they felt good about their learning when they got a good mark in an assessment (Figure 4.8). In addition, about 67% of the participants found it helpful when a teacher did lots of small assessments throughout a topic rather than one big assessment at the end. The results also show that assessment itself can be an incentive for students to learn as 77% of the participants responded that they were more motivated to learn when they knew that they would be assessed. This is also supported by the result that 58% of the participants agreed that increasing the amount of assessment would help their learning.

4.5.2 Data from the Interviews

This section reports data from the interviews. It is divided into subsections based on different formative assessment methods, including Practice, Feedback, Questioning, Sharing assessment criteria, Self assessment, Peer assessment, Group work and Home work.

4.5.2-a Practice

Participants identified practice assessment as a typical formative assessment as it was not a "real" assessment and teachers normally gave feedback or taught more about the topic. They also identified the following activities as formative assessment: normal test in class, common test, past year's exam, practice speech and even internal assessment because it provided a chance for a re-sit.

"Normal test in class will not be recorded in the report and teachers normally go over the answers and teach more to help students understand better."

“Common test help teachers know how well the students understand and teach more about the ones students don’t understand well.”

“Practice speech because after the practice, the teacher usually gives feedback to help the students know how to do it before the real assessment.”

“Internal assessment because after the first assessment, the teacher normally gives feedback on what need to be done and provides a chance for a re-sit.”

“Using past year’s exam papers as practice to help students understand the topic better.”

All the participants liked practice tests and they suggested that they needed more and regular practice tests because they believed it not only helped them understand better but also motivated them.

“I can do better in the real assessment because after doing the same questions again and again, I can be good at it.”

“It can help me understand better because teachers normally correct the answers after the test and give us the answers back to explain in class.”

“It can motivate us to study harder because we don’t study much when there is no test.”

4.5.2-b Feedback

All the participants had in the past received feedback from their teachers either in writing or orally. Teachers normally gave feedback either on what should be improved or what went wrong. Participants all liked their teachers giving feedback because they believed that teacher-feedback could help them with their learning. However sometimes they did not understand teachers' feedback. People had different reasons for their preference for written or oral feedback.

Written feedback

"I like written feedback because I can use dictionary to check any words I don't understand therefore it can help me understand the feedback more easily."

"I like written feedback because I can look at it later. If only listen to oral feedback, I might forget."

"I like written feedback because some teachers have strong accent or use some words we as students have problem to understand."

Oral feedback

"I like oral feedback because I can ask the teacher straight away and don't need to wait for a few days to check it out if I don't understand."

"Some teachers' handwriting is too bad to understand."

“Sometimes I can not understand teachers’ written comments.”

“To me, just feel easy to understand while speaking.”

“Depends on the subject, some subjects like computer study, it is important to have the oral feedback because the teacher can actually show us how to do it.”

4.5.2-c Questioning

Questioning was recommended as one of the most important formative assessment activities used in class (Black & Wiliam, 2002). Teachers normally picked somebody to answer a question straight away if someone already had a hand up, otherwise they would give some hint to help students come up with answers. Participants reported that they usually answered teacher’s questions if they were sure about the answer, otherwise they did not like being asked. Some participants liked teachers asking questions because they believed it helped to check their understanding of the topic. However, there were some participants who did not like teachers asking questions mainly because of the challenges with English. Sometimes they would simply say “I don’t know” even though they actually knew the answer.

“I feel embarrassed.”

“I feel lack of confidence.”

“I am afraid of making mistakes.”

“I worry about my pronunciation because of my accent.”

“Because of my personality, I am shy, don’t like answering questions.”

“Everyone else is English native speaker.”

“I like asking teacher questions instead because I can get the teacher to help me understand better.”

4.5.2-d Sharing Assessment Criteria

Participants responded that not every teacher explained the assessment criteria for every assessment. They also claimed that they did not always understand the assessment criteria. All the participants liked teachers to explain the assessment criteria clearly. Many participants reported that they did ask teachers questions if they did not understand. Participants believed it was definitely important for the teacher to explain the assessment criteria clearly each time because it could help them to know what to do and how to do it in the assessment.

“Sometimes the teacher just reads out on what we need to do in order to achieve for the assessment.”

“Most of the times we are not very clear because of our limited understanding of English as well as the teacher did not explain the criteria clearly.”

“It can help us to be clear about the assessment when the teacher can give us specific details on what should be included in a checking list on a paper.”

4.5.2-e Self Assessment

Many participants had experienced self assessment. Normally they would mark their own work and sometimes the teacher checked it again after their self marking. Many of the participants liked it very much because they could check the answers themselves and thought about the process and found out where they did wrong. They found it easy to remember if they marked it themselves.

“I like it because I can know straight away about what I did wrong. If it is teacher’s marking, I normally don’t think the process on what I did but only pay attention to the mark.”

“I like it because I can check it myself and make some notes next to it so that I can revise later on.”

“I like it because I know why I did it wrong and remember my mistakes easily.”

However, some participants did not like self assessment because they did not trust their own judgement. Especially when they only checked whether the answer was right or wrong, they still could not understand the concept very well when the teacher did not explain the process.

“I don’t like it because I am too lazy to mark it myself sometimes.”

“If the teacher did not explain, even I know the right answer, I still can not understand the concept.”

“I don’t like it because I can easily mark my own work the best when I don’t know what more should be done after I believe I have done my best especially for Art or Design.”

“I believe it is the teachers’ job to mark our work because they are professional, students can not give a professional judgement particularly in Art.”

4.5.2-f Peer Assessment

Participants did mark other people’s work sometimes, however, almost everybody disliked peer assessment because they were worried that their peers might mark their work wrongly. They were also afraid that their peers might laugh at their mistakes or misunderstand their work because of the language barrier. All in all, they did not think it helped them understand better because they usually still did not know how to do it better after the peer assessment. The only good thing about peer assessment they could think of was no pressure when doing the marking.

“I don’t like it only if the person who is marking my work is better than me and is a responsible person.”

“I don’t like it because they might not mark it correctly. May not be responsible for their action.”

“I don’t like it because people may laugh at my mistakes.”

“I don’t like it because I don’t want other people to know my mistakes.”

“I feel embarrassed for my own writing because I have limited English.”

“They may misunderstand my answer because of the language barrier.”

“We normally just check wrong or correct. It did not doing anything to help us understand better so usually we still don’t know how to do after the marking.”

4.5.2-g Group Work

Every participant had experienced group work activities. When it was in group work situation, the teacher had the time to walk around the class asking questions to check students’ understanding. The majority liked group work because they could help each other and did not feel scared to ask questions. They also appreciated the opportunity to get the teacher’s attention while he/she was walking around the class. Participants felt even more motivated with better concentration if it was a game or competition. Only a small number of participants did not like group work because they did not find it very convenient to do what they really wanted in a group situation when people had different ideas.

“When we do group work, the teacher normally walks around the classroom and ask questions to check our understanding.”

“I like doing group work so that I can have the opportunity to get the teacher’s attention for help while he/she walking around.”

“I like group work because we can help each in a group and don’t feel scared to ask questions if I don’t understand.”

“I feel more motivated to study because everybody wants to win if the group work is more like a game.”

“I find that I can concentrate much better than usual if the group work is kind of competition.”

4.5.2-h Homework

Homework was identified as a form of formative assessment activity by the participants because they believed that teachers could use homework to give them feedback on how they could improve in their learning. Every participant had the experience of doing homework. However, only some teachers checked their homework sometimes.

“Teachers normally don’t check our homework.”

“Some teachers check our homework sometimes.”

Some subjects provided exercise books which participants could do the exercises as practice. Some teachers marked the exercise book and pointed out the things that the participants could improve. Participants did not express their attitude towards homework at all in the interview.

4.6 Suggestions

At the end of the questionnaire there were two open-ended questions, to invite participants to suggest activities that they liked or disliked doing. The purpose of this suggestion is to identify any particular activities the participants like or dislike, which could be formative assessment activities. The participants identified 25 different activities that they liked doing. I separated these activities into 4 categories: practice; teacher's help; group work; and other. The participants also identified 22 different activities they did not like doing. These activities were also separated into 4 categories: speaking; reading; writing; and teaching method..

A substantial number of the participants (>38%) indicated that they liked such practice-related activities as practice test, revision exercises, experiment or just practice. More than 20% of the participants responded that they liked receiving help from the teacher, such as getting explanations of exemplars for assessments, working with the teacher individually, and being asked questions before new lessons. Another 16% of respondents liked group work such as games, group discussions and field trips. The other activities suggested by one or two respondents included computer work, note taking, short answers, research, quiet study, self assessment, writing, speaking and drawing.

In terms of activities that students identified that they did not like doing, many were related to teachers' teaching methods or classroom management (37% of the respondents). Top among the list were activities such as taking notes for the whole period, listening to the teacher talking for the whole period, receiving homework that was not taught yet, giving little time for students to write, speaking too fast in class, writing down the questions on board but not the answers, carrying on teaching in a very noisy class, unfair treatment, solving several

problems together at the same time. Another major activity that students did not like (26% of the responses) was speaking-related activities such as presentations and questioning. Other activities that featured in the dislike list included written work (15% responses), and activities that required high level of reading skills such as research, poem interpretation and reading unfamiliar text (11% responses).

In the interview, students suggested several activities they would like to see more often in the classroom.

- Giving exemplars to help students understand assessment criteria better:

“I would like the teacher to give us some exemplars to explain what is good and what is not for the assessment so that we can be clear what we should do for the assessment.”

“Exemplars can help us to develop some ideas about the work and understand how to do it for the assessment.”

Helping students understand assessment criteria is one of the highly recommended formative strategies in Black and Wiliam’s study (1998a)

- Greater variety of activities to keep students engaged in class:

“I would like to have more variety activities in class because it is very hard to concentrate for the whole period while doing the same thing.”

“I don’t like listening to the teacher talking for the whole period especially when the teacher speaks too fast. You can not concentrate after you listen for a while because anything can be distractive.”

- A consistent model for lessons so that students can prepare for the new lesson:

“I think teachers should have a certain model for every lesson instead of jumping around so that we can prepare for the new lesson and also easy to follow during the class.”

- More opportunities to get help from the teacher:

“Teachers need to walk around the classroom more often so that we can get attention when we need help.”

“Sometimes the teacher did not come to help even we put up our hands.”

“Sometimes the teacher said ‘I will be there in a minute’, but never did.”

“I think maybe there are too many students in one class so the teacher did not have the time to help everyone who asked.”

“Some teachers only help some students and even went to their home to help them but not to every student. I believe that teachers should treat everybody the same. Should help everyone not only some.”

- Much more clear explanation

“Teachers need to write down for the students to take notes on what he/she really wants them to do so that the students understand clearly about the requirement.”

“Some teachers’ handwriting on board is very hard to understand, which makes students very hard to take notes.”

Clearly many of these responses do not directly relate to formative assessment, but they do indicate the learning and teaching matters that concerned the participants, and indicate possible influences on classroom participation and attitudes towards formative assessment activities.

4.7 Summary

In this chapter, the data from the questionnaire were presented in figures and tables under the themes of my research questions. The data from the interviews were presented in actual words of the participants as much as possible in order to allow the reader to see the viewpoint of the participants without having their words interpreted by the researcher. The key points from these findings are discussed in the following chapter. Factors that may influence ESOL students’ learning, participation, attitudes in mainstream classroom are also identified and discussed. The implications of the findings are discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

5.1 Introduction

The focus for discussion in this Chapter is the relationship between the results presented in the previous chapter and my research questions on formative assessment. The Discussion is separated under the headings of experiences and attitudes. The discussion summarises the key themes and implications that have emerged from the findings in the study. Some complex issues involved in using formative assessment effectively in mainstream classroom are highlighted and some possible alternative approaches are also suggested.

5.2 Experiences of Formative Assessment and its Effectiveness

Research by Black and Wiliam (1998a) provides a good outline of what educators need to know and be able to do by way of assessment in order to maximize achievement for the maximum number of students: use accurate assessment; give specific feedback; and involve students. We involve students in assessment for learning whenever we do the following:

- Help students understand the learning targets;
- Engage students in self-assessment;
- Help students see their own improvement with respect to the learning targets;
- Give students opportunities to express their understanding;
- Encourage students to set goals and determine the next steps required to move closer to the target (Arter, 2003).

Such student involvement tends to give students a feeling of control over the conditions of their own success.

In this study, nearly 60% of the participants reported that they had been assessed at least once a week. All the responses gathered show that participants did have some experience in formative assessment in mainstream classroom although they did not necessarily understand the meaning of this term. The participants tended to perceive any practice tests as formative as long as they were not worth credits towards NCEA results. The task of assessing students summatively for external purposes is clearly different from the task of assessing ongoing work to monitor and improve progress. However, participants seemed confused about the difference between formative assessment and summative assessment and did not always understand the benefits of using formative assessment in helping their learning. This may indicate that teachers face difficult problems in reconciling their formative and summative roles and, confusion in teachers' minds between these roles can impede the improvement of practice of formative assessment (Black & Wiliam, 1998b). After my explanation of formative assessment, the participants were able to identify the following activities used in classes: practice tests; giving feedback; questioning; sharing assessment criteria; self assessment; peer assessment; group work; and homework.

5.2.1 Sharing Learning Objectives and Assessment Criteria

Helping students understand the learning targets they are to reach is one of the most important elements of formative assessment that teachers should use (Black & Wiliam, 1998a; Clarke et al., 2003). While 33% of the participants believed that their teachers always explained the learning objectives for each lesson, over 41% of the participants only understood the learning

objectives ‘sometimes’. This indicates that learning objectives may be inadequately explained by the teachers, at least in the eyes of ESOL students in mainstream classes. It may well be that the teachers tend to focus on the majority of the students in each class who are predominantly local students and these students have a better understanding of the learning objectives than the ESOL students. It is always a difficult act for the teacher in classes with students of varying English competence. Trying to cater for the interests of one group whilst ignoring those of another will naturally draw negative responses from the neglected group. However, a balanced compromise approach taking both groups along in the class is still possible with some consideration given to the needs of both local and ESOL students.

It is essential for the students to understand the assessment criteria before undertaking the assessment. Sharing assessment criteria was ranked the second highest by participants as being an effective means of helping their learning. All the participants believed it was definitely important for the teacher to explain the assessment criteria clearly each time because it helped them to understand what to do and how to do it in the assessment. However, many ESOL students often did not understand the assessment criteria very well because of their limited English. This could affect their learning as well as their academic achievement. In order to overcome this problem, it is very common for ESOL students to have private tutors after school to help their understanding of assessment criteria in different subjects. Participants also suggested that a check list with specific details on what should be done regarding the assessment would be very helpful. Using some exemplars to explain the assessment criteria was another suggestion from the participants which they believe would also help them understand the criteria more clearly.

5.2.2 Feedback

A paradigm shift in assessment culture has emphasised the importance of formative assessment. Feedback is considered as the central component of formative assessment (Black & Wiliam, 1998a). Feedback provides information about the existing gap between the actual and desired levels of performance. Effective feedback is that which tells the students where they are at, what they have done right, what they have done wrong and how they can improve (Williams, 2001).

The data from this research shows that although about half of the participants were given specific advice on their work, the other half of the participants were given non-specific comments on their work. Forty five percent of the participants were always or often given a mark only. Sixteen percent of the participants were always or often given a tick or date as a feedback on their work. This agreed with Black and Wiliam's findings that marking usually fails to offer guidance on how work can be improved; the giving of marks and grades is oversimplistic; whilst the giving of useful advice and the learning function are underemphasized (Black & Wiliam, 1998b).

Giving specific feedback on every student's work can be time consuming. Teachers might be overworked by the amount of administration involved with the increase in internal assessment practices with the NCEA. As a result, teachers may find insufficient time to focus on how to provide tailored feedback in order to help students to improving their learning, especially when ESOL students still have many language mistakes in their work. However, without detailed feedback and useful advice, students will find it difficult to improve their learning effectively. A numerical mark does not tell students how to improve their work so an opportunity to enhance their learning has been lost (Black & Wiliam, 2002). The implication

of this finding is that the importance of effective feedback needs to be emphasized and teachers need to develop skills and strategies in giving feedback on students' work. In addition, ESOL students need assistance to interpret teacher feedback and apply it to their ongoing learning.

Teacher feedback on students' work or assessment was ranked the most helpful for every aspect of students' learning. For all participants the concept of knowing what has been achieved was very important and, equally, they wanted to know how they could improve. Being told the right answer seemed not good enough especially for those who were still concerned about their English understanding skills. Davies (2004) suggested that the more descriptive feedback students receive, the more likely they are to learn. This echoes a finding by Black and Wiliam (2002) that grades and marks do not deliver as much formative effectiveness as tailored comments; therefore, the quality of feedback is crucial (Sadler, 1998). The participants all mentioned that they would like to have more help from the teacher to understand the work better in order to improve their academic achievement. That is why they highly valued teacher feedback.

Some of the participants commented that they preferred oral feedback simply because this could be done quickly and immediately. Immediate feedback is more beneficial than delayed feedback as it helps students to be sure that they are following instructions correctly. It also means they do not have to wait too long before they can apply their revised understanding in another area (Williams, 2001). However, other participants preferred written feedback because of their limited understanding of English. With written comments, students can get help from a bilingual dictionary or peers to help them understand the feedback better.

Clearly it is desirable to give early and regular feedback both verbally and in writing as a means of improving students' work and enhancing their learning. The specific feedback needs to link to the learning objectives. Sadler (1989) argues that it is insufficient simply to point out right and wrong answers to students. For assessment to be "formative", a student must

- Come to hold a concept of quality roughly similar to that of the teacher;
- Be able to compare the current level of performance with the standard; and
- Be able to take action to close the gap (Sadler, 1989).

The value the participants placed on teacher feedback reinforces other research findings and further highlights the need for teachers too be skilled in this aspect of formative assessment. This finding also has an implication for teaching practice that more specific comments should be included in teachers' feedback to help students identify and monitor their strengths and weaknesses in order to enhance their learning.

5.2.3 Questioning

Social constructivist theory suggests that students learn better by collaborating and discussing concepts with peers than by constructing answers in isolation (Vygotsky, 1978). Giving time for students to discuss with their peers would not only help them to understand the questions better but also to form their answers with the help of their peers. Around one third of the participants in this study reported that teachers seldom gave time for discussion before giving answers. The study shows that one of the major factors that influence the effectiveness of 'questioning' when working with ESOL students is the concept of "wait time". ESOL students may not respond right away, as they need time to reflect on what is asked and put

together the answer in English. The cognitive processing demands extra time for the following process to occur in the learner's brain: a question is asked in English, the brain translates the question into the student's native language, the brain works out the answer in the native language, the brain then translates the answer back into English, the learner then answers the question. However, by the time the student is ready to speak, the teacher has moved on to another student. For this reason, providing an extended period of time for the student to think is essential if questioning is to be a useful formative assessment tool for ESOL students.

A lack of significant wait time can be caused by several factors. In my experience, teacher's lesson plans often require quick responses so as to keep a lesson moving; the teacher may suspect that the mainstream students perceive questioning as a waste of class time; or the teacher may think that the student does not have the answer. Nuthall (2001) points out that teachers have to focus on the performance of the class as a whole and find it impossible to focus on the individual learning of any one student for more than very brief periods in order to manage a class of 25 to 35 students, all of whom have different knowledge, skills, interests and motivations.

Questioning was ranked the third highest preferred assessment activities by participants with regard to its effectiveness in helping students' learning and understanding even though students were reluctant to participate in it. This indicates that the ESOL students in this study were well aware of the value of asking questions or answering teacher's questions in order to help them understand the work and complete assignments successfully. It would be incorrect to assume that all ESOL students have difficulty in asking questions or speaking out in class. In the interviews, some of the participants said that they were quite confident in asking

questions or answering questions in class. They reported that their willingness to ask or answer questions depended on their English language skills and personal confidence. Dickie (1998) suggests that students' cultural influence and the teacher's approach to the students with his/her understanding of the students as learners will also affect students' willingness to ask or answer questions in class.

For some ESOL students, the reluctance to ask questions or speak out in class is due to their respect for authority, a lack of confidence and not wanting to draw attention to themselves. This is especially true for those who are not competent in English. Some students do not know how schooling in New Zealand works and may be slow to adapt (Dickie, 1998). Those ESOL students whose level of English is low will need to overcome the language barrier to feel confident in answering questions. Some participants in this study reported that they did not answer a question unless they were positive that they could say the answer perfectly, especially when surrounded by native speakers. They also pointed out that ESOL students were usually afraid of making mistakes when they spoke English in front of English native speakers. As a result, it affected their participation in this type of formative assessment activity. My own teaching experience tends to suggest that if a student does not understand, he or she will not admit it in class but will try to learn it alone.

A lack of critical thinking skills can be another factor preventing some students from being involved as a questioner and engaging in group discussion (Dickie, 1998). Students who have been brought up in a culture that values more of a transmission style of learning may find it difficult to think critically and engage with higher level questions that are valued in Western pedagogy. These skills are highly valued in New Zealand schools and students are assessed on their ability to use these skills.

In addition, the technique of questioning also affects the effectiveness of this as a formative assessment tool. When teachers ask questions, they often ask more than one question at the same time. Therefore, ESOL students often do not know which question to answer, which is why some of the participants pointed out that teachers often speak too fast and they could not understand teachers' questions or explanations. To avoid putting an ESOL student in an awkward position, the teacher should ask the student a specific question and ask one question at a time. The teacher should also provide clear information as to exactly what is being asked, and give clear guidelines as to what is expected. The English language used in the question should be very clear and direct. The speed at which the teacher speaks when 'questioning' should also be considered when trying to improve the effectiveness of this formative assessment method. For example, the typical English speaker may speak too fast to be understood by ESOL students. Therefore, it is important for the teacher to speak at an appropriate speed so that the students understand exactly what is being asked. Black and Wiliam (2002) suggest that more effort should be made in framing questions that are worth asking, increasing wait time and improving rich follow-up activities.

5.2.4 Self-assessment

Self-assessment by students is deemed by some to be an essential component of formative assessment (McDonald & Boud, 2003). 52% of participants from this study indicated that self-assessment was always or often used in their mainstream classrooms. Some participants did not think self-assessment helped with their learning while others liked this method of assessment. It is to be expected that one assessment method is effective for some students but not for others because ESOL students come from diverse learning backgrounds.

Self-assessment is one of the most important activities used in formative assessment. It is considered to be one way to help students to develop valued learning skills such as self reflection, critical thinking, self discipline, and independent learning (Black & Wiliam, 1998a). While some participants thought self-assessment was quite a useful tool in helping their learning, others, especially those students who were more likely to view the teacher as a model and an authority, disagreed with the effectiveness of this method. Those who thought it was a useful exercise reported that they could find out themselves where they had been right or wrong. Self assessment helped them to think about the process rather than only paying attention to the outcome. It also helped them to understand their mistakes and learn from the mistakes more easily. On the other hand, others reported that it was hard to mark their own work because they believed it was the teacher's job to judge and for them to accept the judgement. In subjects such as Art, Design etc, it was particularly difficult for ESOL students to trust their own judgement. Self assessment helped the students to check their answers but without the teacher's explanation it did not help their understanding. Therefore, some participants felt uncomfortable in self-assessment and did not see it as a useful tool in helping their learning.

Some of the participants indicated that ESOL students tend to want more error correction and believe that only the teacher can make the professional judgement. This agrees with Hyland's study (as cited in Ellis, 2007) that students prefer to be corrected by the teacher than a peer. On the other hand, Western teachers are more likely to believe that students should have an internal locus of academic control and take responsibility for their own learning (Ward, 2001). Black and Wiliam (1998b) indicate that self assessment is more often a device to save the teacher time than a way of engaging pupils in their own learning. Teachers now have heavy

work loads, and self-assessment does provide efficiency in assessment. However, only when it is used in a way to help students understand and improve their work will it effectively help students' learning.

5.2.5 Peer-assessment

Klecker (2002) found classroom assessment using cooperative groups uniformly positive to students' performance. This approach is rooted in the theoretical assumptions that learning is an active, constructive process; that it depends on rich context; that learners are diverse; and that learners are inherently social. The data in this study shows that only 18% of the participants often experienced peer assessment. Almost everyone indicated that they disliked peer assessment mainly because they had no confidence in their peers. They were concerned that their peers might laugh at their mistakes, misunderstand their answers, and might be unable to make a fair and accurate judgement on their work.

Peer-assessment has been much favoured by researchers in the past (Klecker, 2002; Orsmond et al., 2004) but in this study it received the lowest rank regarding its effectiveness in helping students' learning. This dislike for peer assessment reflects some suspicion among students that their peers, both native English speakers and other ESOL students, may lack the ability to mark their work correctly. Participants from this study indicated that they were concerned that their native English peers might make fun of their mistakes particularly in the use of English language.

As with self-assessment, participants' cultural or educational background might have prevented them from valuing the benefit of this type of assessment if they believed only the

teachers could assess their work (Reid, 1987). If there is no significant intercultural interaction in the classroom, ESOL students are unlikely to feel comfortable and confident in peer assessment and as a result to experience the benefits of peer assessment on their learning.

5.3 ESOL Students' Attitudes Towards Formative Assessment

Both the questionnaire and interviews asked the participants to identify the assessment activities used in class which they believed were effective in helping in their learning. Reasons for their attitudes towards different assessment activities used in class were also explored.

Participants involved in this study identified different types of formative assessment which they perceived as being most beneficial to their learning. As we have already seen, they valued teacher feedback along with sharing assessment criteria. They appreciated the questioning skills that teachers had which helped them develop ideas and understanding of their work. All those responses were related closely to those developed through the review of the literature.

One of the five key factors of effective formative assessment identified by Black and Wiliam (1999) is the recognition of the profound influence that assessment has on the motivation and self-esteem of pupils, both of which have crucial influences on learning. The findings from this study showed that the majority of the students found formative assessment more helpful than summative assessment mainly because it helped them improve their understanding of the topic and of assessment. It helped to increase their self-confidence when they understood better.

In order to explore the factors which are involved in the effectiveness of using different formative assessment activities in mainstream classroom, the participants were asked to give reasons for their likes and dislikes about the activities used in class. Some of the activities relate to formative assessment are discussed in the following sections.

5.3.1 Speaking Related Activities

Most of the participants indicated their dislike for speaking-related activities. They indicated that limited English could be the main reason, which affected their confidence in speaking. An average of 76% of the international students (who make up a large number of ESOL students) in schools were reported to have English language level at the “beginner” or “elementary” level (MOE, 2002). The participants further explained that unless they could say the sentence correctly, and knew beyond doubt that the answer was correct, they might refuse to say anything, especially when surrounded by native speakers.

However, there could be other reasons behind their dislike of speaking-related activities in class. Ward (2001) suggested that students from individualist cultures (including New Zealand) were more likely to want to “stand out” in class, to ask questions, give answers and engage in debate. Students from collectivist cultures (including most Asian countries), in contrast, were more strongly motivated to “fit in”. They were less likely to be verbally interactive in classes and were usually unwilling to draw attention to themselves. Collectivism is strongly related to power distance, and those students who are from high power distance cultures are also less likely to question and debate. Students are all expected to interact with the class, however, ESOL students, particularly Asians, are usually

uncomfortable speaking out or drawing attention to themselves, and may be hesitant and shy about speaking in class (Ward, 2001).

Many speaking related activities can be formative assessment activities. If ESOL students do not like this kind of activities, it will certainly affect the effectiveness of formative assessment used in mainstream classroom on ESOL students' learning.

5.3.2 Practice

All the participants liked practice tests and recommended that they needed more and regular practice tests because they believed that these helped their understanding as well as their motivation in study. The participants reported that they normally enjoyed learning when they felt confident. Feeling confident is related to being good at something and for ESOL students, this is related to feeling that they understand the task and the content. Participants suggested that the way to help ESOL students understand better was to practise assessment tasks more often in order to help them to overcome the language barrier. The participants reported that they usually regarded tests as a way to prove themselves, therefore they usually took it very seriously; as a result, they often felt motivated to learn when they knew they would be tested.

5.3.3. More Clear Explanation and Help from the Teacher

All the participants showed their desire of getting more help from the teacher in class. However, teachers often do not have the time to help everyone who asks for help in class because of the number of students in one class. ESOL students felt that they were more neglected than Kiwi students because ESOL students were normally quiet in class. They

stated that although they did put up their hands to get the teacher's attention, teachers often paid attention to those who were noisy in class.

Participants also suggested that much more clear explanation in class was required in order to help their understanding. They reported that they often had difficulty in understanding teacher's explanation in class because some teachers spoke too fast. They also reported that some teachers' handwriting on board was very hard for ESOL students to understand. Therefore, clearly written notes for ESOL students are important in helping their learning.

The essential element of formative assessment is feedback. Feedback involves explanation in speaking or writing. Whether teachers can give clear explanation for ESOL students will affect their understanding of the assessment. However, if the teacher lacks the necessary training and skills to work with ESOL students, it may be difficult for the teacher to understand the needs of ESOL students and help them effectively. While on average only about half of ESOL staff in schools have some qualifications in teaching ESOL, many schools provide no initial preparation to mainstream teachers to assist them to teach ESOL students (MOE, 2002). Many mainstream teachers express the difficulty in accessing professional development opportunities in teaching ESOL students (MOE, 2002).

5.3.4 Group Work

Group work was identified by some of the participants in this study as useful assessment activity because they can get feedback from peers as well as teachers to help them understand better. Many participants valued learning support from peers or from group work. The majority of the participants liked group work because they felt more comfortable to ask for

help in a group situation than in front of the class. They also appreciated the opportunity to seek help from the teacher when it was group work time because the teacher normally walked around the class to check on students' understanding. Some participants even felt more motivated with better concentration in their learning if it was a game or competition.

Although research suggests that most students, both international and domestic, prefer to work in "their own" groups, studies have also shown that intercultural group work reduces stereotypes and increases the willingness to work with members of other groups (Ward, 2001). Ward further suggests that simply having ESOL students in class itself, even in large numbers, will not automatically promote intercultural interactions, develop intercultural friendship and result in international understanding, so planned group activities provide opportunities to enhance intercultural interactions. As a result, it may improve the effectiveness of peer assessment for ESOL students.

It must be remembered, however, that ESOL students have a variety of needs and preferences in learning and there is no one correct learning style, teaching or assessment method for all ESOL students.

5.4 Other Implications of Findings

In this study, the students' understanding about formative assessment and their interactions with teachers and peers were influenced by their culture, language skills, and what teachers do in the classroom. The other factors that influence ESOL students' learning are outlined in the following section.

5.4.1 The English Language Used in Formative Assessment Activities

This research suggests that ESOL students' limited English competency is a major factor in affecting the effectiveness of formative assessment to enhance learning. Language can be so convoluted that even native speakers can misinterpret its meaning and miscommunicate. Therefore, in order to realise the full potential that formative assessment can offer to enhance learning for ESOL students, it is important for teachers to take steps to minimise the impact of the language barrier. Listed below are some examples that teachers can undertake to achieve this. Teachers need to clarify expressions, words and symbols that have multiple meanings when speaking to ESOL students. They should restate complex instructions using simple English that can not be misinterpreted. Teachers should review vocabulary and key concepts whenever necessary with a method which can connect students' background knowledge to abstract ideas. It is also helpful to generate a table asking students to identify words that have similar meanings, or make vocabulary charts that include abbreviations and symbols and encourage them to write their own definitions to words in order to build up their academic vocabulary for different subjects.

It is important to use clear, basic English for all questions, explanations and instructions and give short, concise directions one step at a time and repeat them as often as necessary.

5.4.2 Alternative Assessments

ESOL students are at a distinct disadvantage when they are measured against native English speakers (Whelan Ariza, 2006). Assessments can measure content knowledge as well as language proficiency. Questions asked in assessments often neglect the complexities of

overall learning and can not accurately measure the ability of ESOL students (Whelan Ariza, 2006). Formative assessment is an ongoing process to guide the teacher in classroom practice. When used properly, formative assessments can be a valuable tool in helping students learning.

Alternative assessment such as interviews, observations, checklists, reflective writing, portfolios, drawings etc. will help teachers adequately assess and evaluate students' work. An assessment that requires competent English proficiency may not truly test ESOL student's academic abilities. Proper assessment must be a vital part of the assessment programme in order to avoid inaccurate placements. In some cultures, the process of finding the answer is not as valued as the final answer, so students from those cultures will feel difficult to understand the teacher's need to see the work process. They may misinterpret it as the teacher not trusting their genuine work. Teachers must discuss the importance of process as well as product before the assessment.

ESOL students from different cultures will have a variety of learning preferences. Teachers should experiment with a variety of alternative activities, and note the methods students prefer. Examining students' written work can be a useful assessment technique, which can provide the opportunity for ESOL students to show their understanding without peer pressure inhibiting their interactions with the teacher. Students should be allowed to make both grammatical and spelling mistakes but teachers should make sure to provide the correct response back to the students.

It is very important that teachers recognize that ESOL students acquire verbal skills faster than writing skills. Therefore, flexibility and acceptance of mistakes are key factors in

helping ESOL students move forward in their writing. Students should be encouraged to learn the proper way to express their thinking by rewriting their drafts but they should not be penalized for their language mistakes in assessments.

Teachers should find as much information as possible about the academic abilities of their ESOL students' and take this into consideration during their instruction and assessments. It is important for the students to feel challenged, yet successful and productive. Therefore, assignments must be varied to meet these diverse levels. A lack of English fluency does not indicate a lack of knowledge or intelligence. Therefore, assessments should be culturally responsive and yet match the curricular goals of the classroom or school. Assessment modifications for ESOL students need to be implemented whenever possible.

5.5 Summary

The findings of this study suggest that there is a need to reconsider the effectiveness of formative assessment used in mainstream secondary classrooms with ESOL students. Although formative assessment has been shown to be effective in enhancing students' learning in the past, this study shows that ESOL students have particular needs and not all formative assessment methods are equally effective in enhancing ESOL students' learning. Some formative assessment methods are preferred to others. This needs to be taken into account when developing assessment strategies for mainstream classes with ESOL students. The limitations of the research are discussed and further research is recommended in the next chapter.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSIONS

6.1 Introduction

This research was carried out in order to explore senior ESOL students' experiences of and attitudes towards formative assessment. Understanding more about formative assessment from the learner's point of view was identified as being important by Black and Wiliam (1998a) who called for research to be carried out into other aspects of formative assessment, e.g. if some of the formative assessment approaches were applicable to students from all cultural backgrounds. A desired outcome of the research was an improved knowledge and understanding of how formative assessment might be used effectively to enhance ESOL students' learning. To achieve this aim, qualitative research was conducted, using mixed methods involving questionnaires and interviews. In total 100 senior ESOL students from 5 schools were involved in the study.

6.2 Main Findings

This study reveals that a range of formative assessments are used in secondary mainstream classrooms. Although unfamiliar with the terminology word "formative assessment", the ESOL students who participated in this study were able to identify and describe assessment activities used in mainstream classroom that characterised formative assessment. However, their attitudes towards those activities and the perceived effectiveness of them in enhancing their learning were found to vary widely. Not all formative assessment methods were favoured by the ESOL students and not all were perceived as effective. The students' perceptions of the effectiveness of the formative assessments were affected by the students'

level of English competency, their cultural backgrounds, and the way teachers applied the assessment methods.

Feedback was the most favoured formative assessment method because the students could find out what they had done correctly and where they went wrong. A simple mark or grade, in contrast, was insufficient. Questioning was not liked by the ESOL students, partly because of the language barrier which limited their understanding of the questions, partly because of the way teachers asked the questions (i.e. no wait-time), and partly because of cultural sensitivity (i.e. not wanting to draw attention to oneself). However, a significant number of ESOL students highly valued this method as it could be an effective way to help their understanding and learning if it was used with cultural sensitivity. Similarly, self-assessment was liked and found to be useful by some participants whereas peer assessment was not liked because of the students' mistrust of their peers' ability to mark their work correctly. Sharing learning objectives and assessment criteria was regarded as an important way to enhance learning as long as teachers provided clear explanations.

It is clear that ESOL students have special characteristics and special needs mainly in relation to their English language development and cultural up-bringing. An analysis of the data from this study indicates a number of areas where teachers can improve formative assessment's effectiveness in enhancing ESOL students' learning. These include that teachers need to recognise the special characteristics of ESOL students and adjust their use of formative assessment accordingly. It may require training through professional or personal developments as teachers may have the desire to help ESOL students to enhance their learning but this may not in fact be occurring when the teacher was brought up as part of the mainstream culture

6.3 Limitation of the Research

There are several limitations of the study that need to be considered when using the findings from the study. The size of the sample could be one of the main limitations of this study.

Although the range of schools involved in the study represented single boys' school, single girls' school and three co-ed schools, and they were from a range of socio-economic spectrum, the participants were mainly from Asian backgrounds, predominately China, Korea, Thai and Japan. However, there was a range of year levels of senior students from year 11 to year 13 and students chose a range of subject areas to comment on their experiences and attitudes.

The English competency of the participants is another factor identified as a possible limitation. The students involved in this study articulated thoughts and ideas which might be common to other senior ESOL students and the data gathered was rich enough for some trends to be developed. However, participants with a low level of English competency may not have understood the questions clearly or fully expressed their ideas. This could be one of the reasons why some participants chose the middle box for every statement for the Likert scale items. In the interviews, some participants appeared to lack confidence in responding to questions and in clarifying their thoughts and ideas. Further studies could be designed in the future to verify the findings of this study with ESOL students representing a broader spectrum of English competency. The responses may be different depending on the English competency of the students.

This study is based on the reported experiences of a group of senior ESOL students. I was not able to observe the reality of the experiences that the participants recounted. The study lacks

the perspectives of the mainstream classroom teachers. A different methodological approach, such as a focus group of teachers and ESOL students, as an opportunity for observing shared dialogue between teachers and students, could also have provided valuable insight into ESOL students' experiences and attitudes towards formative assessment in mainstream classroom.

6.4 Further Research

Several questions have arisen from the study that are worthy of further research. These are related to teachers' knowledge and classroom practice.

This study has explored the experiences of and attitudes towards formative assessment from senior ESOL students' perspective. However, as indicated above, it would be interesting to study teachers' experiences and knowledge of formative assessment and their understanding of ESOL students' general learning needs, particularly in relation to assessment techniques. Further research in this area could provide important information about whether what the teacher believes is the same as what the students' need is in terms of effective assessment methods in enhancing students' learning. Further research on the factors that influence teachers' choices of assessment methods will provide useful information on how to improve assessment for learning in mainstream classrooms.

The information may offer guidance for further investigation into effective models of professional development which maximise teachers' capability of effective teaching in a multi-cultural classroom. The research concerning the effects of particular types of formative

assessment used for ESOL students would provide useful information for professional development for teachers to use these methods to enhance ESOL students learning.

Some of the participants from this study suggested that teachers needed to have more knowledge about students' cultures and students should not be expected to act as cultural experts in class. They also felt uncomfortable when the teacher made generalisations about Asian people. Although they might have felt somewhat resentful, they did not feel it necessary for them to speak out to correct the teacher in class. Further research in this area could provide useful information on effective teaching in a cross-cultural classroom.

6.5 Summary

The ESOL students who participated in this research expressed generally positive attitudes towards the ideas and activities of formative assessment. Their cultural background, English language competence and previous learning experiences contributed to them perceiving some formative assessment strategies more favourably than others, but the educational value was often recognised even for unpopular strategies. The message for teachers seems to be that formative assessment is valued and the effective implementation of a range of formative assessment activities throughout the teaching programme has the potential to enhance the learning of ESOL students. Ensuring these students understand the use and purpose of formative assessment further increases the likelihood of this occurring.

I hope that the issues discussed in this study provide insight into the challenges of working with ESOL students, and may stimulate teachers to reflect on their own teaching practice and consider ways in which they can utilise FA to enhance the learning of ESOL students.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Aitken, R. (1999). *Teacher perceptions of the use and value of formative assessment in secondary English programmes*. Paper presented at the NZARE / AARE, Melbourne, Australia.
- Allan, G. (1991). Qualitative Research. In G. Allan & C. Skinner (Ed.), *Handbook for research students in the social sciences* (pp. 177-189). London: The Falmer Press.
- Anstrom, K. (1999). *Preparing Secondary Education Teachers to Work with English Language Learners: Mathematics*. Retrieved March 27, 2007, from <http://www.necla.gwu.edu/pubs/resource/ells/math.htm>
- Arter, J. A. (2003). Assessment for Learning: Classroom Assessment To Improve Student Achievement and Well-being. *Measuring Up: Assessment Issues for Teachers, Counsellors, and Administrators* (pp. 463-484). Retrieved October 29, 2005, from ERIC database.
- Ballard, B., & Clanchy, J. (1991). Assessment by misconception: cultural influences and intellectual traditions. In L. Hamp-Lyons (Eds.), *Assessing second language writing in academic contexts* (pp.19-35). Norwood NJ: Ablex Publisher.
- Bell, J. (1993). *Doing your research project* (2nd ed.). Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Black, P., & Wiliam, D. (1998a). Assessment and Classroom Learning. *Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy and Practice*, 5(1). Retrieved October 22, 2005, from Professional Development Collection database.
- Black, P., & Wiliam, D. (1998b). Inside the Black Box: Raising Standards Through Classroom Assessment. [Electronic version]. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 80, 139-147.
- Black, P., & Wiliam, D. (1999). *Assessment for Learning: Beyond the black box*. London: The Falmer Press.

- Black, P. & Wiliam, D. (2002). *The starting point: from inside the black box*. London: The Falmer Press.
- Bogdan, R. C., & Biklen, S.K. (1998). *Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theory and methods*. (3rd ed.). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Bogdan, R. C., & Biklen, S.K. (2003). *Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theory and methods*. (4th ed.): New York: Allyn & Bacon.
- Brannen, J. (1992). *Mixing Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Research*. England: Avebury, Ashgate Publishing Ltd.
- Broadfoot, P. (2000). Assessment and intuition. In T. Atkinson & G. Claxton (Eds.), *The intuitive practitioner* (pp.199-219). Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Brown, J. (2004). Research Methods for Applied Linguistics: Scope, Characteristics, and Standards. In A. Davices, C. Elder. (Ed.), *The Handbook of Applied Linguistics* (pp. 476-500). Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.
- Burns, R. (2000). *Introduction to research methods* (4th ed.). NSW, Australia: Longman.
- Christians, C. G. (2005). Ethics and Politics in Qualitative Research. In N. K. Denzin, Lincoln, Y.S. (Ed.), *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research* (pp.139-164). California: Sage Publications Inc.
- Clarke, S., Timperley, H., & Hattie, J. (2003). *Unlocking Formative Assessment - Practical strategies for enhancing pupils' learning in the primary & intermediate classroom* (NZ ed.). Auckland, New Zealand: Hodder Moa Beckett.
- Cleal, J. (2002). Little things mean a lot: language, assessment and 21st century learners in Australian universities. In P. Ninnes, L. Tamatea (Ed.), *Internationalizing education in the Asia-Pacific region: critical reflections, critical times* (pp. 64-72). Armidale NSW: School of Education, University of New England, Australian and New Zealand Comparative and International Education Society.

- Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2000). *Research Methods in Education* (5th ed.). London & New York: RoutledgeFalmer.
- Corson, D. (1993). Restructuring minority schooling. *Australian Journal of Education*, 37(1), 46-48.
- Crooks, T.J. (1988). The impact of classroom evaluation practices on students. *Review of Educational Research*, 58, 438-481.
- Crooks, T. J. (2002). Educational Assessment in New Zealand Schools. *Assessment in Education*, 9(2), 237-253.
- DalGLISH, C. (2005). *Expectations and reality - a model for meeting international student needs*. Paper presented at the 2005 ISANA Conference, Christchurch New Zealand.
- Davies, A. (2004). *Lesson in assessment*. Retrieved June 26, 2007, from http://www.edgazette.govt.nz/articles/show-_articles.php?id=6616
- Denscombe, M. (1998). *Good Research Guide for small-scale research projects*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Denzin, N.K., & Lincoln, Y.S. (2000). *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. California: Sage Publications Inc.
- Dickie, J. G. (1998). *Pacific Nations Students in Primary Teacher Training: Investigating their Learning Needs*. Unpublished master's thesis, Victoria University of Wellington, Wellington, New Zealand.
- Duff, P. (2005). ESL in Secondary Schools: Programs, Problematics, and Possibilities. In E. Hinkel (Ed.), *Handbook of Research in Second Language Teaching and Learning* (pp. 45-63). London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers.
- Ellis, R. (2007). *Cognitive, Social and Psychological Dimensions of Corrective Feedback*. Presented at the 2007 Social & Cognitive Aspects of Second Language Learning and Teaching Conference, University of Auckland.

- Foliaki, L. (1994). Commonalities and diversities. In H. McQueen (Ed.), *Education is change: Twenty viewpoints* (pp. 98-108). Wellington: Bridget Williams Books Limited.
- Fontana, A., & Frey, J.H. (2005). The Interview: From Neutral Stance to Political Involvement. In N. K. Denzin & Y.S. Lincoln (Ed.), *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*. California: Sage Publications Inc.
- Gibbons, P. (2002). *Scaffolding Language, Scaffolding Learning: Teaching Second Language Learners in the Mainstream Classroom*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Gipps, C. (1994). *Beyond testing: Towards a theory of educational assessment*. London: Falmer Press.
- Glesne, C. (1999). *Becoming qualitative researchers: an introduction*. New York: Longman.
- Goh, D. (2005). NCEA - Bane or born? *ACE Papers*, 15, 88-102.
- Harklau, L. (1994). ESOL versus mainstream classes: Contrasting L2 learning environments. *TESOL Quarterly*, 28(2), 241-272.
- Hellner, J. (2003). NCEA: A terrible Beauty is Born. *New Zealand Education Review*, October, 2-8.
- Hunkin, G. (1996). *A possible missing factor: The role of Pacific Islands Languages in the education of Pacific Islands children in New Zealand*. Paper presented at the Pacific Islands Learning Symposium Conference, Auckland
- Hunt, E., & Pellegrino, J. (2002). Issues, Examples, and Challenges in Formative Assessment. *New Directions for Teaching and Learning*, 89, 73-85.
- Jonasson, D. (2004). *Assessment: The master key unlocking deep learning and language*. Paper presented at The 15th ISANA International Conference, Melbourne.
- Kennedy, P. (2002). Learning cultures and learning styles: myth-understandings about adult Chinese learners. [Electronic version]. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 21, 430-445

- Klecker, B. (2002). *Formative classroom assessment using cooperative groups: Vygotsky and random assignment*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Midwest Association of Teachers of Educational Psychology, Oxford.
- Lamon, M. (2007). *Learning Theory - Constructivist Approach*. Retrieved June 11, 2007, from <http://education.stateuniversity.com/pages/2174/Learning-Theory-CONSTRUCTIVIST>.
- Lincoln, Y.S., & Guba, E.G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Lloyd, M. (1995). Bridging the Cultural Gap: A literature review of factors influencing Samoan students' acculturation to western education. *Many Voices*, April, 11-13
- Lovell, J. (2004). Lost possibilities: Reflecting on New Zealand's NCEA qualifications experiment. *English teaching: Practice and Critique*, 3(3), 88-94.
- Lumley, T., & Brown, A. (2005). Research Methods in Language Testing. In E. Hinkel (Ed.), *Handbook of Research in Second Language Teaching and Learning*. London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- McDonald, B., & Boud, D. (2003). The impact of self-assessment on achievement: the effects of self-assessment training on the performance in external examinations. *Assessment in Education*, 10 (2), 209-220.
- McMillan, J. H. (2003). *The relationship between instructional and classroom assessment practices of elementary teachers and student scores on high-stakes tests*. Research report, retrieved November 29, 2005, from ERIC database.
- Ministry of Education. (1993). *The New Zealand curriculum framework*. Wellington: Learning Media.
- Ministry of Education. (2002). *A Census of Providers of ESOL Programmes for International Students*. Retrieved November 6, 2006, from http://www.minedu.govt.nz/print_doc.cfm?layout=document&docementid=7844&ind

- Ministry of Education. (2006). *Enrolments of International Students by Nationality*. Retrieved November 6, 2006, from http://www.minedu.govt.nz/print_doc.cfm?layout=document&document=11526&ind
- Mutch, C. A. (2003). *Context, complexity, and contestation in curriculum construction: developing Social Studies in the New Zealand Curriculum*. Published PhD Thesis, Griffith University, Australia.
- Mutch, C. A. (2005). *Doing Educational Research: A Practioner's Guide to Getting Started*. Wellington: NZCER PRESS.
- NCEA. (n.d.). National Certificate of Educational Achievement. Retrieved June 29, 2007, from <http://www.nzqa.govt.nz/ncea/>
- Natriello, G. (1987). The impact of evaluation processes on students, *Educational Psychologist*, 22, 155-175.
- Neuman, W. L. (1997). *Social research methods: qualitative and quantitative approaches*. (3rd ed.). Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Neville, B., Willis, P., & Edwards, M. (1994). *Qualitative research in adult education*. Adelaide: University of South Australia.
- Nuthall, G. (2001). *The cultural myths and the realities of teaching and learning*. Paper presented to the NZARE Conference, New Zealand.
- Orsmond, P., Merry, S., & Callaghan, A. (2004). Implementation of a formative assessment model incorporating peer and self-assessment. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*, 41(3), 273-290.
- Patton, M.Q. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods*. (2nd ed.). Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publication.
- Reid, J. M. (1987). The learning style preferences of ESL students. *TESOL Quarterly*, 21(1), 87-109.

- Rubin, H. J., & Rubin, I.S. (1995). *Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Sadler, D. R. (1989). Formative assessment and the design of instructional system. *Instructional Science*, 18(2), 119-144.
- Sadler, D. R. (1998). Formative assessment: Revisiting the territory. [Electronic version]. *Assessment in Education*, 5(1), 77-84.
- Shenton, A.K. (2004). Strategies for ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research projects. *Education for Information*, 22, 63-75.
- Shepard, L. A. (2005). Linking Formative Assessment to Scaffolding. *Educational Leadership*, 63(3), 66-70.
- Silverman, D. (1993). *Interpreting Qualitative Data: Methods for analysing talk, text and interaction*. London: Sage Publications.
- Smith, A. (1998). New survey reveals changing attitudes. *American Language Review*, 2, 28-29.
- Statistics New Zealand. (2002). *2001 Census of population & dwellings: Asian People*. Wellington: Statistics New Zealand.
- Stiggins, R. (2002). Assessment Crisis: The absence of Assessment FOR Learning. [Electronic version]. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 83 (10), 758-765:
- Taylor, S.J., & Bogdan, R. (1998). *Introduction to qualitative research methods: A guidebook and resource*. (3rd ed.). New York: John Wiley & Sons.
- Tharp, R. G., & Gallimore, R. (1988). *Rousing minds to life: Teaching, learning, and schooling in social context*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- Thomas, R.M. (1998). *Conducting Educational Research: a comparative view*. Westport: Bergin & Garvey.

- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: the development of higher psychological processes*. Edited by M. Cole, V. John-Steiner, J. Scribner, & E. Souberman. Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1986). *Thought and language*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Ward, C. (2001). *The impact of international students on domestic students and host institutions*. Report to the Ministry of Education, Wellington.
- Webb, G. (1997). Deconstructing Deep and Surface: towards a critique of phenomenography for staff developers. *Higher Education*, 33, 195-212.
- Wertsch, J. V. (1991). *Voices of the mind: A sociocultural approach to mediated action*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Whelan Ariza, E. N. (2006). *Not for ESOL teachers: what every classroom teacher needs to know about the linguistically, culturally, and ethnically diverse student*. Boston: Pearson / A and B.
- Wiliam, D., Lee, C., Harrison, C. & Black, P. (2004). Teachers developing assessment for learning: Impact on student achievement. *Assessment in Education*, 11(1), 49-65.
- Williams, J. A. (2001). *Voices from the black box: The perceptions of some New Zealand children of the effects of formative assessment on their learning*. Unpublished dissertation, University of Tasmania, Launceston.
- Wilson, K. (2001). *Making the transition to study in English: is extra time in examinations for NESB students a desirable option?* Paper presented at the 2001 Australian language and Academic Skills Conference, University of Wollongong.
- Zuengler, J., Cole, K.M. (2005). Language Socialization and Second Lanaguage Learning. In E. Hinkel (Ed.), *Handbook of Research in Second Language Teaching and Learning*. London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

APPENDICES

A. Letters of Information



Dear Principal

My name is Huili Feng. I am working towards a Masters of Teaching and Learning at the Christchurch College of Education. As part of my degree I am required to undertake a research project. I will be working under the supervision of Jae Major and Judy Williams, Lecturers at the Christchurch College of Education.

Project Title: *Senior ESOL students' experiences of and attitudes towards Formative Assessment in the mainstream secondary classroom*

Studying in a foreign language is an enormous challenge. The extent of this challenge is often reflected in the performance of ESOL students. Formative Assessment is acknowledged as one of the best ways to raise students' achievements in the classroom. However, there is a lack of understanding of ESOL students' experiences of and attitudes towards Formative Assessment in the mainstream classroom. There is also a lack of research on ESOL students' understanding of Formative Assessment and whether Formative Assessment is effective to improve ESOL students' learning. This research aims to investigate how Formative Assessment might be effective from the perspective of senior ESOL students so that teachers can use the results to further develop their knowledge and make changes in their practice.

I am looking for students from year 11 to year 13 who have been in New Zealand secondary schools for more than a year. Students will be asked to fill out a questionnaire which explores their experiences of Formative Assessment in mainstream classroom and their opinions about Formative Assessment activities. They will also be asked to participate in an interview which will explore their attitudes toward Formative Assessment if they are selected.

The questionnaires will take about 15 minutes to complete and will be done during a negotiated lunchtime under the supervision of the researcher and a school teacher in term two or term three. The interview will take about 20 minutes and will be done during a lunch hour in term 3 at school by the researcher.

No findings that could identify any individual participant or the school will be published. Since data must be stored for at least five years according to The Christchurch College of Education regulations, participants will be asked to invent a code name which will be put on questionnaires. The questionnaire will be collected and processed by the researcher and nobody will be able to identify individual student's work.

Participation in the research project is, of course, entirely voluntary. Students who agree to participate can withdraw at any time until the data collection is completed by writing to the researcher. They may also choose not to answer some of the questions.

The Christchurch College of Education Ethics Committee has reviewed and approved this study.

Complaints Procedure

The College requires that all participants be informed that if they have any complaints concerning the manner in which a research project is conducted, they may be given to the researcher, or, if an independent person is preferred, to:

The Chair
Ethical Clearance Committee
Christchurch College of Education
P O Box 31-065
Christchurch
Phone: (03) 345 8390

Please contact me if you have any other queries or concerns about the project or would like to be informed of the aggregate research findings. I can be reached by phone on: 03 348 5003 or by email: fengh@staff.cbhs.school.nz

Thank you very much for your support and cooperation.

Huili Feng



Information for Participants' Parents/Guardians

My name is Huili Feng. I am working towards a Masters of Teaching and Learning at the Christchurch College of Education. As part of my degree I am required to undertake a research project. I will be working under the supervision of Jae Major and Judy Williams, Lecturers at the Christchurch College of Education.

Project Title: *Senior ESOL students' experiences of and attitudes towards Formative Assessment in the mainstream secondary classroom*

Studying in a foreign language is an enormous challenge. The extent of this challenge is often reflected in the performance of ESOL students. Formative Assessment is acknowledged as one of the best ways to raise students' achievement in classroom. This research aims to investigate how Formative Assessment might be effective from the perspective of senior ESOL students. The findings will help teachers improve their knowledge and practice in Formative Assessment.

I am looking for students from year 11 to year 13 who have been in New Zealand secondary schools for more than two years. I wish to invite your child to participate in my research by completing a questionnaire. Following this, if he/she is selected, he/she will be invited to be part of a group for an interview. The questionnaire and the interview will explore the students' experiences of Formative Assessment and their attitudes towards it.

The questionnaires will take approximately 15 minutes to complete and will be done at lunchtime under the supervision of the researcher and a school teacher. The interview will take about 20 minutes and will be done at lunchtime at school by the researcher.

No findings which could identify your child will be published because no name but only a code number will be used for the research. Only my supervisor and I will have access to this data which will be stored for at least five years as prescribed by the College regulations.

If you agree that your child can participate, you may withdraw your consent at any time until the data collection is completed by notifying me by phone or in writing. Your child can also return questionnaires with some questions left unanswered. Not participating in the research will not disadvantage your child in any way.

If you have any queries or would like to be informed of the aggregate research findings, please contact me by phone on: 03 348 5003 or by email: fengh@staff.cbhs.school.nz

The Christchurch College of Education Ethics Committee has reviewed and approved this study.

Should you have any complaint concerning the manner in which this research project is conducted, please do not hesitate to contact the Ethical Clearance Committee.

The Chair
Ethical Clearance Committee
Christchurch College of Education
P O Box 31-065
Christchurch 8030

Telephone: (03) 348 2059

or

Email my supervisor: jae.major@cce.ac.nz

Thank you for your support and cooperation

Huili Feng

PH: 03 348 5003 x 205

Note: Formative Assessment is a type of assessment method where teachers use the assessment information to adapt their teaching and learning to meet the needs of the students.



Information for Participants

My name is Huili Feng. I am working towards a Masters of Teaching and Learning at the Christchurch College of Education. As part of my degree I am required to undertake a research project. I will be working under the supervision of Jae Major and Judy Williams, Lecturers at the Christchurch College of Education.

Project Title: *Senior ESOL students' experiences of and attitudes towards Formative Assessment in the mainstream secondary classroom*

Studying in a foreign language is an enormous challenge. The extent of this challenge is often reflected in the performance of ESOL students. Learning is driven by what teachers and students do in classroom. Therefore teachers need to know about their students' progress and difficulties with learning so that they can adapt their own work to meet students' needs. However, differences in schooling and cultural traditions lead to different understandings of learning, teaching and assessment.

Formative Assessment is acknowledged as one of the best ways to raise students' achievements in classroom. This research aims to investigate how Formative Assessment might be effective from the perspective of senior ESOL students so that teachers can use the results to further develop their knowledge and make changes in their practice.

I am looking for students from year 11 to year 13 who have been in New Zealand secondary schools for more than two years. I wish to invite you to participate in this research. You will be asked to fill out questionnaires that ask what teachers normally do in the mainstream classroom for assessment, feedback, and involvement in ESOL students' learning. You will also be asked of your understanding of Formative Assessment activities used in the classroom and how this affects your attitudes towards your participation in Formative Assessment in the mainstream classroom.

The questionnaires will take approximately 15 minutes to complete and will be done at lunchtime under my supervision and a school teacher. If you are selected, you will be invited to participate in an interview. The interview will take about 20 minutes and will be done at lunchtime at school by me.

No findings which could identify any individual participant will be published because no names but only a code number will be used for the research. Only my supervisor and I will have access to this data which will be stored for at least five years as required by the College regulations.

If you agree to participate, you may withdraw your consent at any time until the data collection is completed by notifying me by phone or in writing. You can also return

questionnaires with some questions left unanswered. Not participating in the research will not disadvantage you in any way.

If you have any queries or would like to be informed of the aggregate research findings, please contact me by phone on: 03 348 5003 or by email: fengh@staff.cbhs.school.nz

The Christchurch College of Education Ethics Committee has reviewed and approved this study.

Should you have any complaint concerning the manner in which this research project is conducted, please do not hesitate to contact the Ethical Clearance Committee.

The Chair
Ethical Clearance Committee
Christchurch College of Education
P O Box 31-065
Christchurch 8030

Telephone: (03) 348 2059

or

Email my supervisor: jae.major@cce.ac.nz

Thank you for your cooperation

Huili Feng

PH: 03 348 5003 x 205

B. Consent Forms

**Declaration of Consent*****Participant Name:***

I consent to participate in the research project, *Senior ESOL students' experiences of and attitudes towards Formative Assessment in the mainstream secondary classroom.*

I understand the information provided to me about the research project and what will be required of me if I participate in the project.

I understand that the information I provide to the researcher will be treated as confidential and that no findings that could identify either me or my school will be published.

I understand that my participation in the project is voluntary and that I may withdraw from the project at any time until the data collection is completed without incurring any penalty.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Parent/Guardian

I give permission for _____ to participate in the project, *Senior ESOL students' experiences of and attitudes towards Formative Assessment in the mainstream secondary classroom.*

I have read and understood the information provided to me concerning the research project and what will be required of my child.

I am satisfied that _____ understands what will be required of him/her in the project.

I understand that the information participants provide to the researcher will be treated as confidential and that no findings that could identify either them or their school will be published.

I understand that participation in the project is voluntary and that either I or my child may choose to withdraw from the project at any time until the data collection is completed without incurring any penalty.

Name: _____ Date: _____

Signature: _____

C. Questionnaire

Using formative assessment: Questionnaire

Read carefully before you start:

This survey is part of my study for a Masters of Teaching and Learning. The results of the survey will be used to complete my Master's thesis. There are **no right or wrong answers** and you only need to put down **what you think is the best answer**. Your answers should be based on your experiences in **any of your subjects**. This is not about your ESOL. Please choose one of your subjects as your experience for this questionnaire. Your input will be very valuable. I would appreciate it if you would take a few minutes to fill in the questionnaire. All your answers are completely **confidential**, therefore **do not write your name** on this form. **Please ask** me to explain any of the questions you are not clear about and **return the questionnaire** when you have completed the questions. Thank you very much.

For each question, unless otherwise instructed, please **circle the ONE response** which best reflects your opinion.

Section One

1. Year level: a. Year 11 b. Year 12 c. Year 13
2. Your choice of the subjects for this questionnaire: _____
3. What is your favourite subject? _____
4. How long have you been in a New Zealand secondary school? ____year(s) ____ month(s)
5. What is your nationality? _____
6. What language / languages do you speak? _____
7. On average, how often do your teachers assess your work? _____
 - a. a few times a week b. once a week c. once every two weeks d. once every month
 - e. once every term f. once every two terms g. once a year

Section Two

8. Do your teachers tell you the learning objectives you are to reach at the beginning of each of your lessons? Normally your teacher starts with a sentence "You are going to learn -----". For example: "You are going to learn how to use the past simple tense to describe a past event."

always	often	sometimes	seldom	never
5	4	3	2	1
9. Do you understand the performance criteria for each of your assessments in order to reach your learning objectives? Normally this starts with a sentence "I should be able to -----". For example: "I should be able to apply the rules to change regular present simple verbs to past simple verbs and use the past simple tense to talk about my past history."

always often sometimes seldom never
5 4 3 2 1

10. When the teacher asks a question in class, what does he/she normally do?

	always	often	sometimes	seldom	never
a. wait for a few hands up, then pick one of them to answer					
b. give us a few minutes to discuss with a partner before giving answers					

11. How often are you given feedback regarding your assessment / work and in which way:

	always	often	sometimes	seldom	never
a. mark or a grade only					
b. mark or a grade & written specific advice on what I can do to improve					
c. mark or a grade & written non-specific comments(eg. you did great; you need to work on this etc)					
d. a tick or a date only					
e. oral feedback only					

12. Does your teacher ask you to check your own work against the performance criteria in order to make improvements?

Always often sometimes seldom never
5 4 3 2 1

13. Does your teacher ask you to check your classmate's work against the performance criteria in order to help him/her improve?

Always often sometimes seldom never
5 4 3 2 1

14. The table below has some types of assessment that your teacher might use in the classroom. For each please **say whether or not you have experienced it first**, then say what you thought about it in terms of : a. Its effectiveness in helping your learning; b. How well you understand it; c. Your participation in the activity; d. Your attitude towards it. Please **rate 1 to 5** in the boxes:

	Yes No	<i>learning</i>	<i>understanding</i>	<i>participation</i>	<i>attitude</i>
Teacher sharing assessment criteria with you					
Questioning					
Teacher giving feedback on your work / assessment					
Self assessment					
Peer assessment					

a. *Effective in helping learning*
Very much much some a little not at all
5 4 3 2 1

b. Your understanding of the activity

Very much	much	some	a little	not at all
5	4	3	2	1

c. Your participation in the activity

Always	often	sometimes	seldom	never
5	4	3	2	1

d. Your attitudes towards the activity

Very much like	somewhat like	neither like nor dislike	somewhat dislike	very much dislike
5	4	3	2	1

Section Three

15. What feelings do you have towards your assessments at school in general?

Very confident	confident	coping	struggling	hate it
5	4	3	2	1

16. I find it helpful when a teacher does lots of small assessments throughout a topic, rather than a big assessment at the end.

Strongly agree	agree	undecided	disagree	strongly disagree
5	4	3	2	1

17. I believe that I am more motivated to learn when I know I will be assessed.

Strongly agree	agree	undecided	disagree	strongly disagree
5	4	3	2	1

18. I feel good about my learning when I get a good mark in an assessment.

Strongly agree	agree	undecided	disagree	strongly disagree
5	4	3	2	1

19. I believe that increasing the amount of testing will help my learning.

Strongly agree	agree	undecided	disagree	strongly disagree
5	4	3	2	1

20. Are there any other assessment activities used in class you particularly like or you don't like?

I like the following activities:

I don't like the following activities:

21. If you would like to ask any questions about assessment, please write here.

Thank you so much for completing this questionnaire!

D. Semi-structured Interview Questions

- **Do you know what formative assessment is? Give me an example of assessment activity used in class could be formative assessment activity.**
- **Do you know the difference between formative assessment and summative assessment? Give me two different assessment activities to explain the difference.**
- **Could you please identify any formative assessment activities used in class? You can choose one particular subject (not ESOL).**
- **Do you like any of those activities used in class? What are they? Why?**
- **Is there any activities used in class you don't like? What are they? Why?**
- **Is there any activities you would like your teacher to do more often in class? What are they? Why?**